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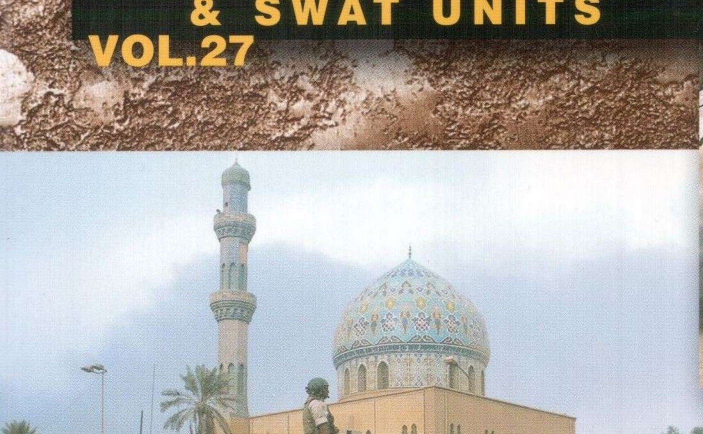
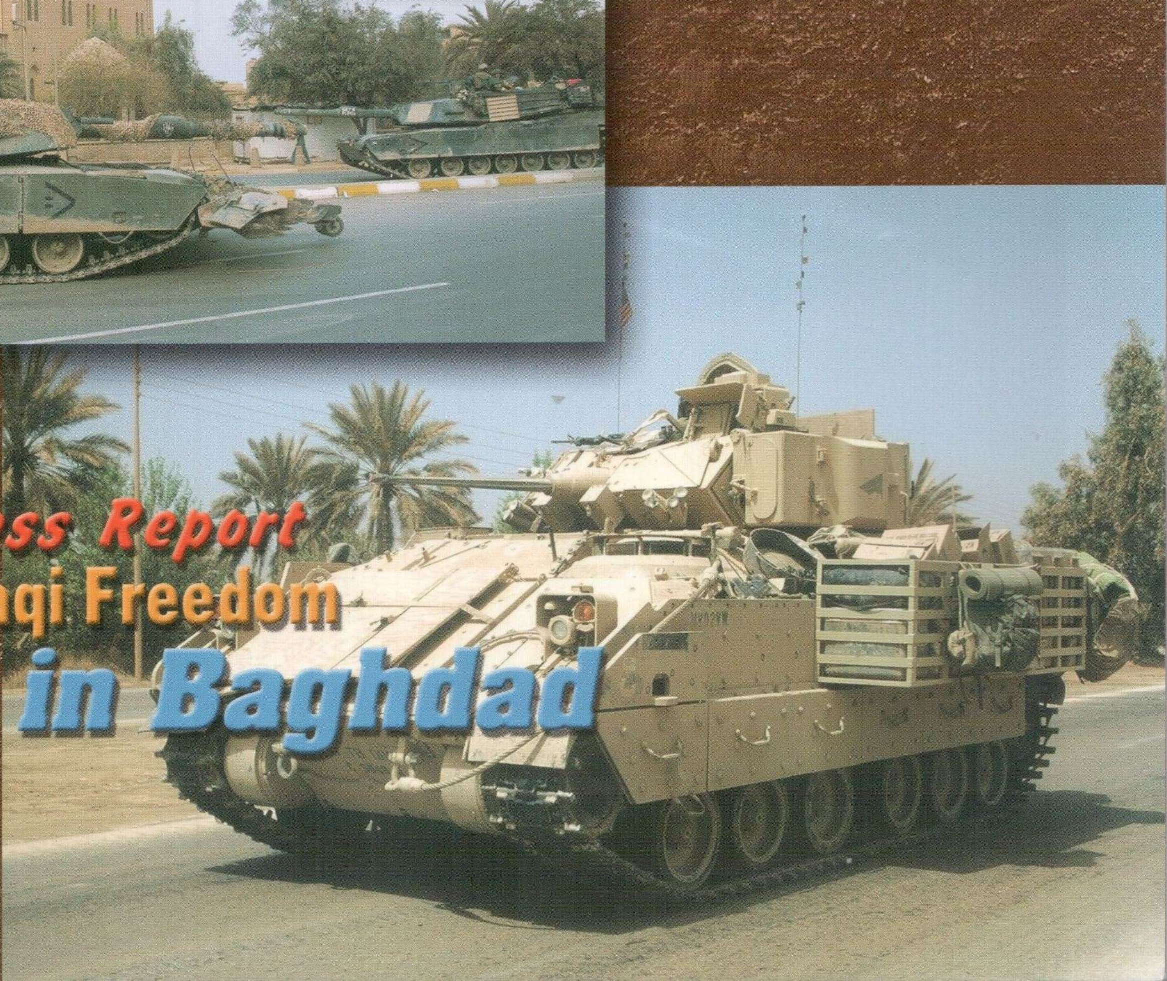
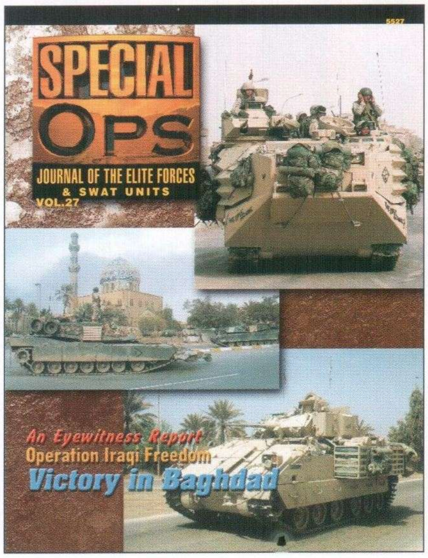




An Eyewitness Report

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Victory in Baghdad



Editor: James R. Hill
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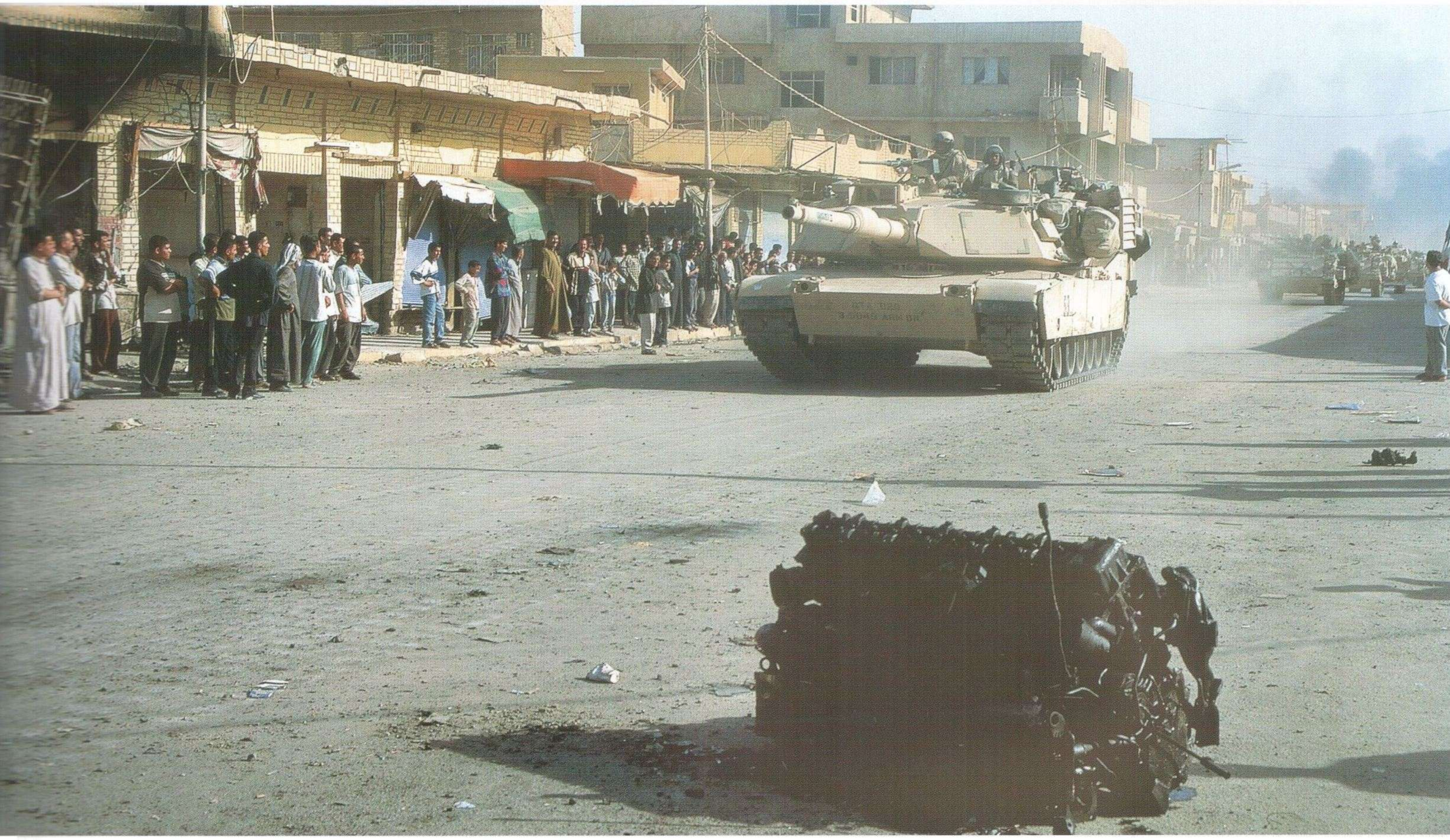
Introduction

In March and April of 2003, the author, a French photojournalist who was not officially "embedded" with any specific military unit, managed to travel along with elements of the 3rd Infantry Division and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) from Kuwait to Baghdad during the recent war in Iraq. (Sometimes this was only accomplished with great difficulty.) Along the way he was captured by the Iraqis and wound up being escorted by an Iraqi information officer. The narrative in this article begins when he was in Iraqi custody prior to the fall of Baghdad.

Yves Debay

Disaster in Al Mahmudiyah



Under the resentful glare of the inhabitants of Al Mahmudiyah, armored vehicles of the 3rd ID roll through the center of town. If the US troops had bypassed the town, they would have spared the population further humiliation and injury. In the foreground is the driving block of a T-72, which was propelled about 20 meters from the wreck of the tank by the force of the internal explosion.

On the morning of 4 April, the author was taken to the town of Al Mahmudiyah, located 30 kilometers south of Baghdad, which was the site of a sad spectacle. Five T-72 tanks belonging to the Medina Division of the Republican Guard were destroyed in the middle of town during the previous night. Three more of the same type of tank could be found wasting away north of the town. The A-10A or Apaches that destroyed these tanks did not bother themselves with niceties and the explosion of these tanks in the narrow streets of the town caused a number of civilian casualties.

Angrily, unbelieving inhabitants of the town who were gathered around the wreckage told the author that two hundred people, some of them children, were killed during the night. They asserted that hundreds were wounded. These numbers are no doubt exaggerated, but it is certain that the destruction of these tanks did create some innocent victims.

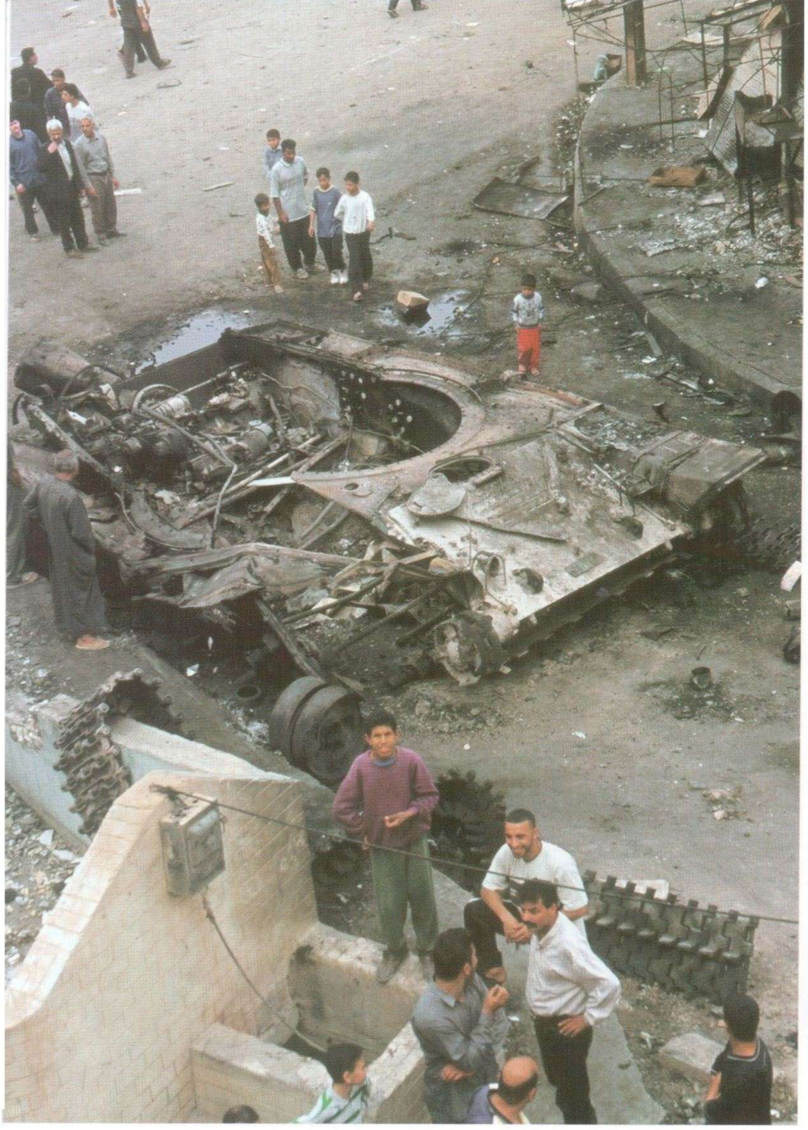
The question arises as to whether it was necessary for the Americans to destroy these tanks when they were in the middle of town, knowing that the collateral damage could be enormous. Although the Pentagon affirmed that during this war everything would be done to avoid civilian losses, the deaths at Al Mahmudiyah seem to contradict this claim.

Every military man knows that tanks positioned in the middle of own pose less danger since they cannot maneuver to use their main gun. A TOW platoon, a mine unit or an Apache keeping watch over the route out of town could have prevented any attempted escape by these T-72s. Instead, the US command decided to not take risks and neutralize the tanks that arguably posed no real threat to the 3rd Infantry Division, though dozens of civilians were killed or injured in the process.

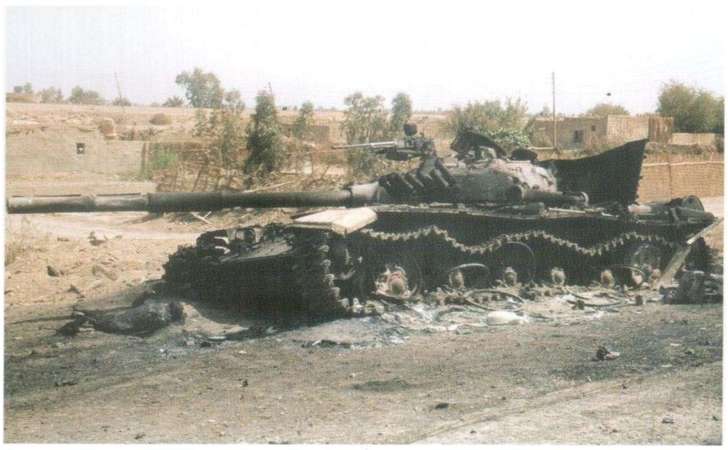
At around 1600, an armored column rolled through the center of the town at full speed without stopping. Standing at the foot of the darkened wreckage, the children of the town did not greet the vehicles. In their eyes there was only the look of hatred. Is America creating a new generation of Fedayeen (Saddam Hussein loyalists)?

[Editor's Note: The loss of civilian lives is sad and regrettable. But when we recall the intentional mass slaughter of civilians in air raids, etc., during the Second World War, it can be averred that a noticeable effort was made to limit the civilian casualties in this conflict.]

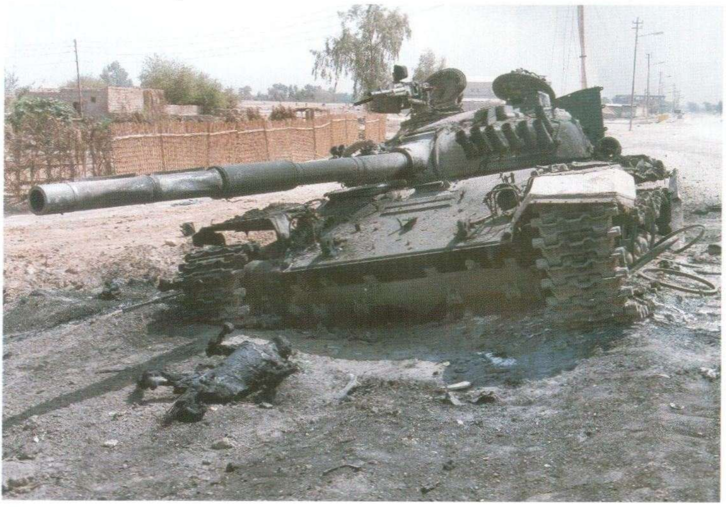
The remains of a T-72 sits near a burned building in Al Mahmudiyah.



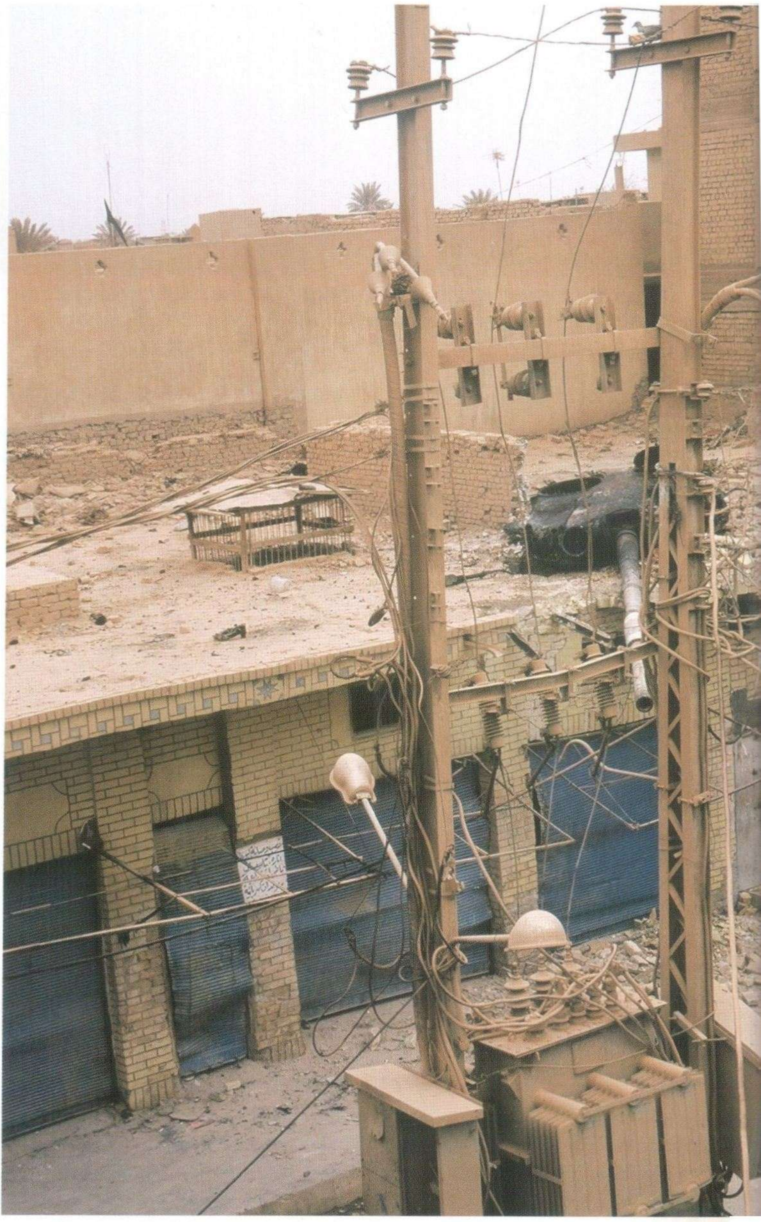
As is often the case with T-72s, the explosion of the tank's ammunition blew the turret right off its chassis.



The destruction of the T-72s at Al Mahmudiyah was an easy American military victory but an indisputable psychological defeat.

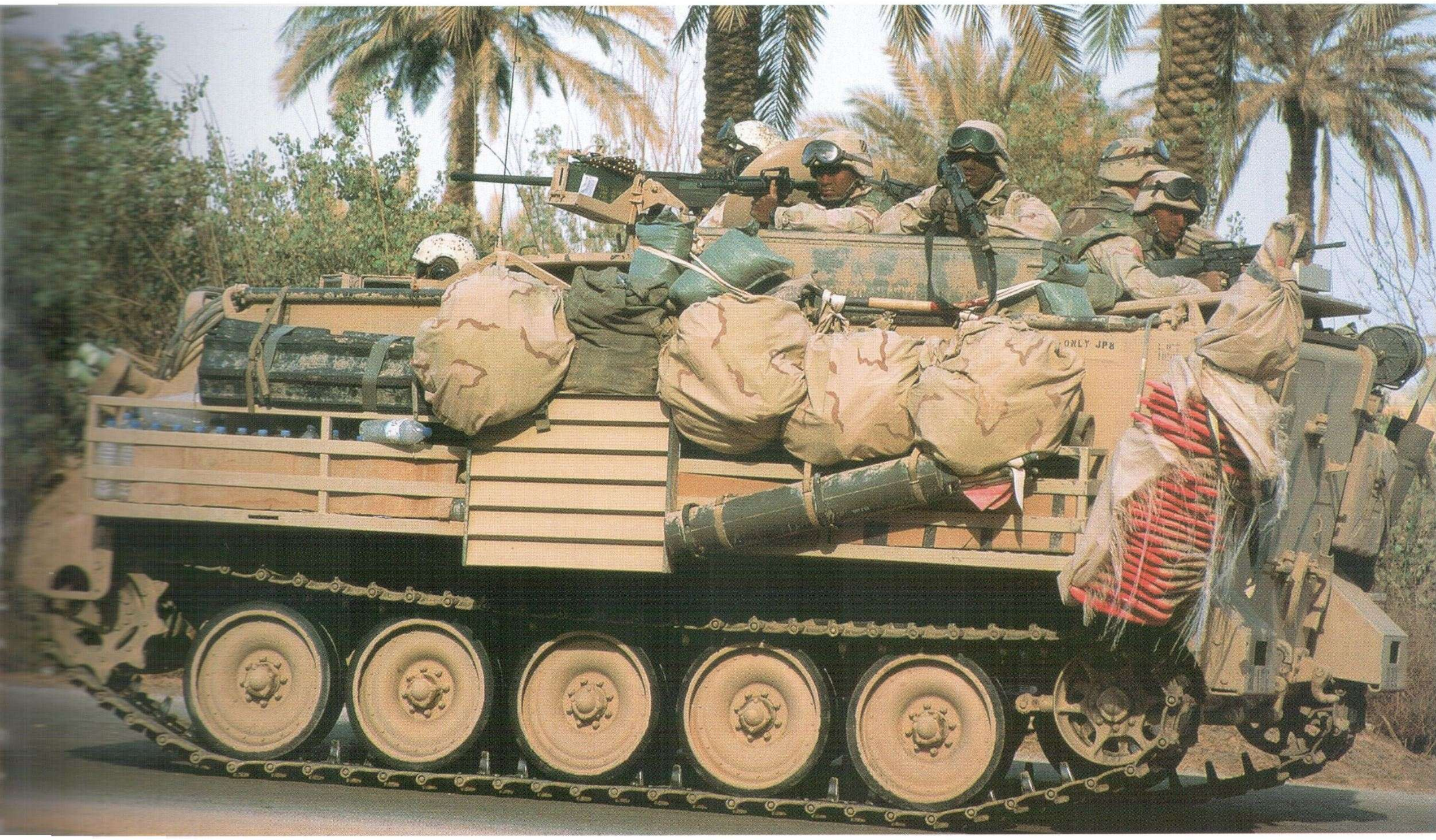


The charred corpse of a tank crew member rests in front of the wreckage of a T-72 in the northern suburb of Al Mahmudiyah. The neutralization of this tank during combat is totally justifiable, but the destruction of the T-72s in the middle of town is more difficult to understand.



The turret of the exploded T-72 was discovered on the roof of a dwelling before the fire could spread to nearby homes.

The "Infernal" Columns of the 3rd Infantry Division



This photograph gives a good idea of how the US troops stowed their personal gear on the exterior of an M-113 armored personnel carrier during the fighting in Iraq.

While the Marines of the 1st MEF progressed between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, the 3rd Infantry Division, after having crossed the desert, followed the Euphrates along its right bank. Between 27 March and 3 April, the "Marne Division" met tough resistance in the holy cities of Najaf and Karbala. Then came the crossing of the Euphrates that was hotly contested by the Iraqis. On 4 April, the division arrived in Al Mahmudiyah. It was in the south of the town at 1300 that the author came face to face with the unstoppable columns of the 3rd Infantry Division, led by the armored vehicles of the 1-64 Armor Regiment. In one row, M-2/M-3 Bradleys and M-1A1s, with their turrets at the 3 o'clock and 9 o'clock positions, advanced southward with all their weapons blazing.

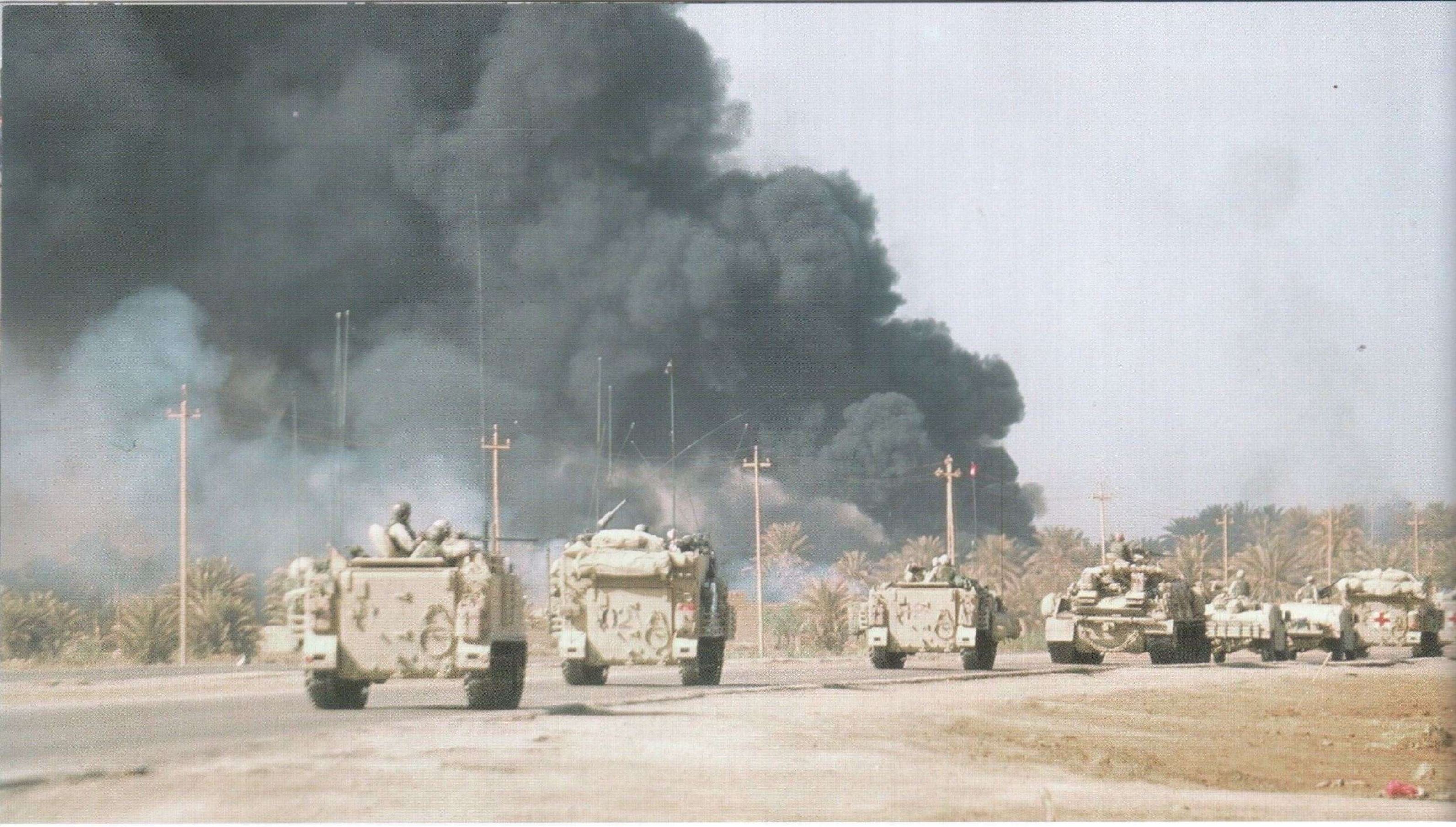
The Iraqi military *matériel* abandoned along the road drew particular attention, but the Bradleys systematically fired their 25mm guns at the groves of palm trees. After arriving at the village of Al Latifyah, 25 kilometers to the south, the column joined another task force. The formation changed their direction and returned to the north, greatly increasing the firing as they progressed. This time, the M-1A1s leading the advance traveled three abreast.

With machine gun, and sometimes with 120mm cannon, the M-1A1 tanks fired on anything that appeared to be moving. Using their 25mm guns, Bradleys from the 3-15 Infantry caused abandoned Iraqi trucks and artillery pieces to burn like torches. Sometimes a cannon would recover and a deadly shell would tear up a wall. But the crews of the tanks did not seem too concerned with what was happening behind them. In the middle of the road, several 57mm twin-tube anti-aircraft guns hidden in a grove of palm trees drew fire. When an ammunition truck exploded, fire spread to the date palm trees. It was hell. Fragments of steel the size of one's forearm rained down around the author's car. In the M-113 armored personnel carriers, the GIs tucked their helmeted heads into their shoulders. From one of the APCs, a captain yelled to the author in perfect French: "My good friend, you are completely mad to be here!"

On this afternoon, 116 M-1A1 Abrams and 52 M-2/M-3 Bradleys of the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division sow terror in their wake. The Republican Guard, the supposed pride of Saddam Hussein's army, is only a memory.

In the evening of 4 April, the brigade announces that it has destroyed a hundred vehicles. This is exactly correct, but their crews had abandoned them the day before.

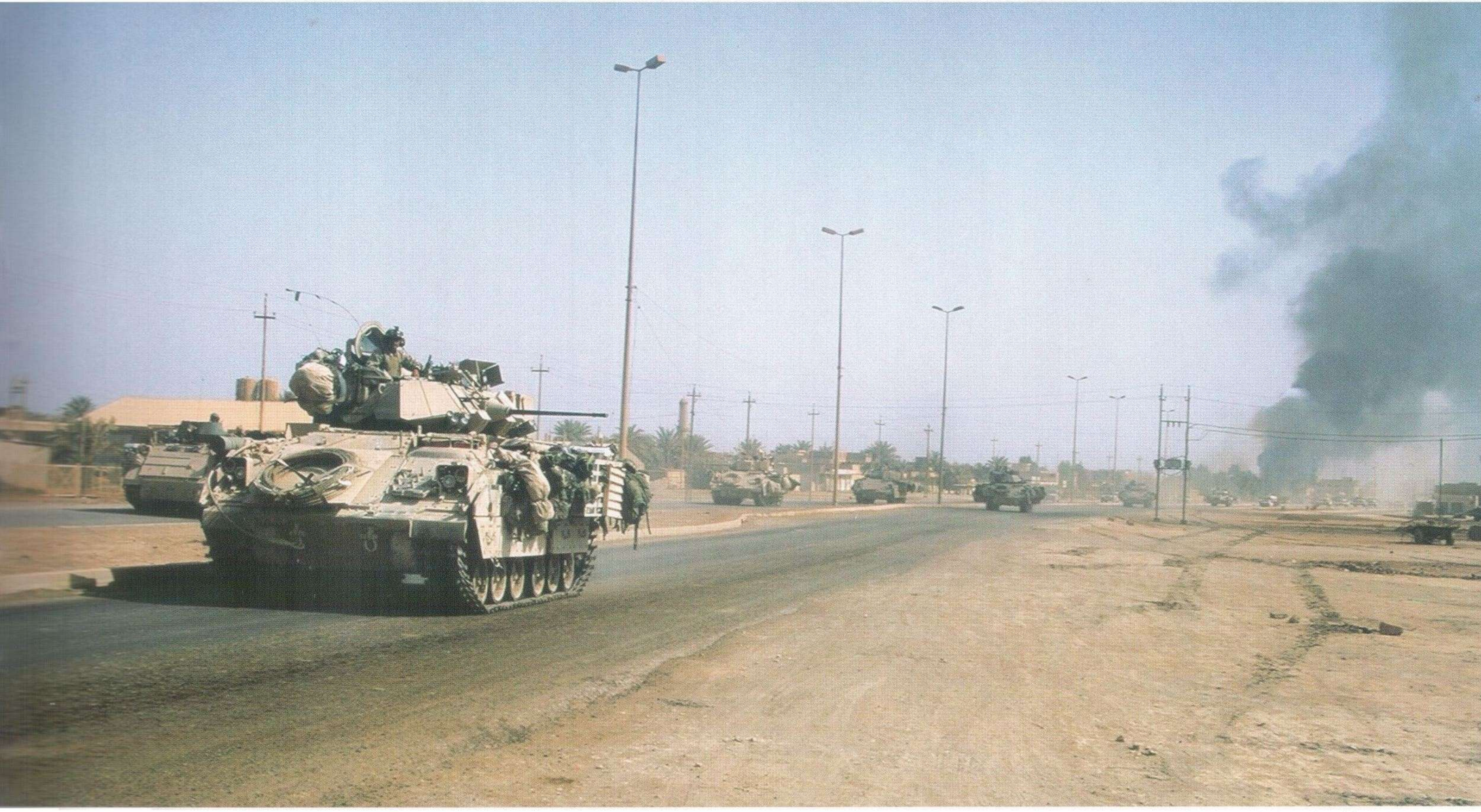
Spectacular plumes of smoke indicate the presence of the infernal columns of the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd ID.



Between Al Mahmudiyah and Al Latifyah, the columns of the 3rd ID fired at everything that moved, causing billowing clouds of smoke to mark their advance.

US Army vehicles advance on the road to Baghdad as evidence of their handiwork burns alongside the road.

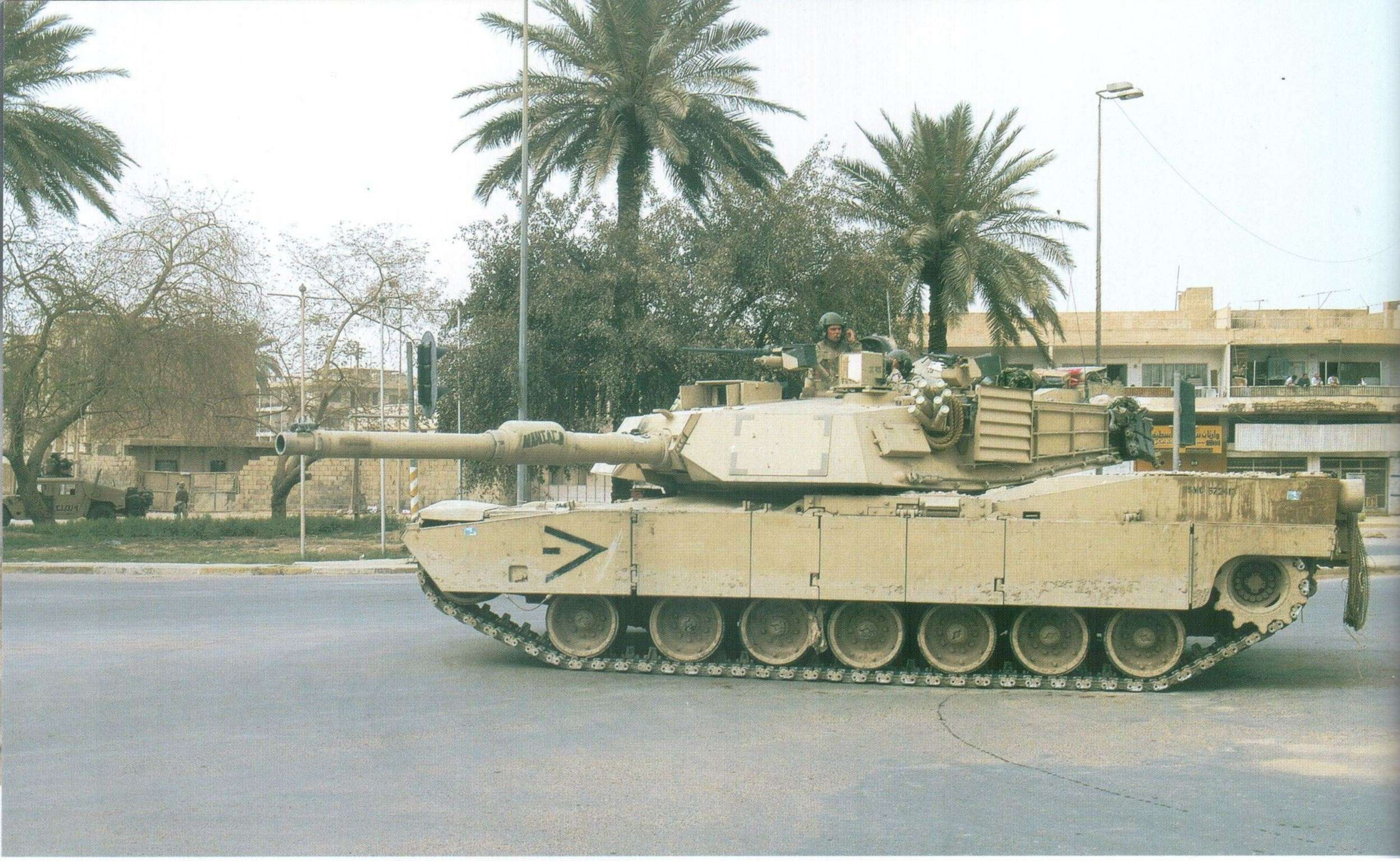
Wreckage smolders in the wake of the advance of the infernal columns of the 3rd ID.



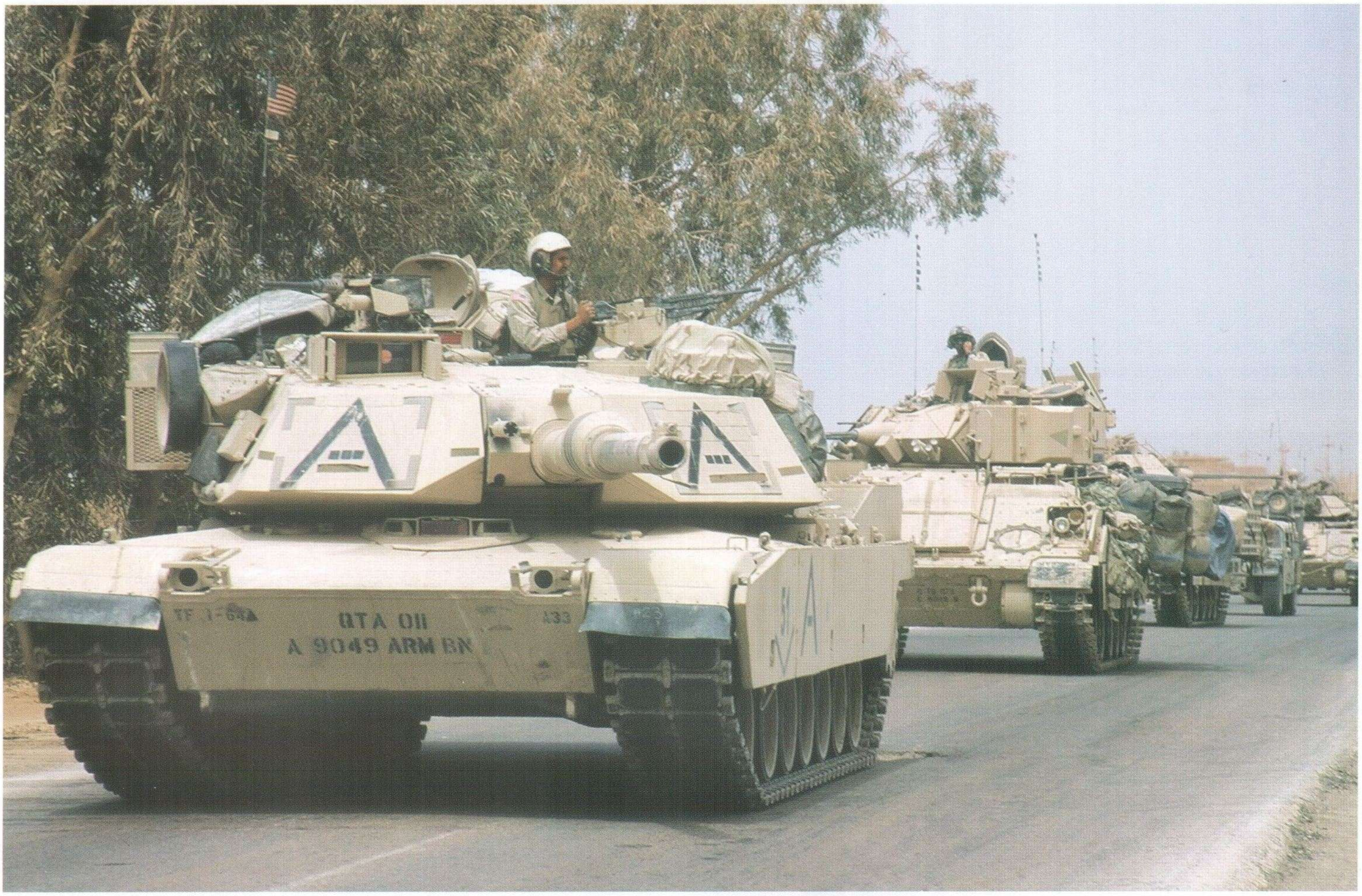
The destruction and havoc wreaked by the columns of the 3rd ID was not as much tactical as it was psychological. It was intended to show that, nearly at the gates of Baghdad, the American forces could do what they wanted to do, when and where they wanted do it.

Fire in a grove of palm trees spreads to an ammunition truck.

Two hours prior to the explosion of this ammunition truck, the author passed this same grove of palm trees. The trucks and twin-tube AA guns hidden there were abandoned but intact.



The M-1A1 Abrams tanks are always in their proper place at the head of the advancing column.


TF 1-64
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The 2nd Brigade is armored and is equipped with 116 M-1A1s. This photo is an excellent source of information for modelers of this MBT.

Black smoke rises to the sky for a backdrop for this photograph of an M-1A1 Abrams. The 2nd Brigade has two battalions in Iraq, the 1-64 and 4-64 Armor.

TF 1-64
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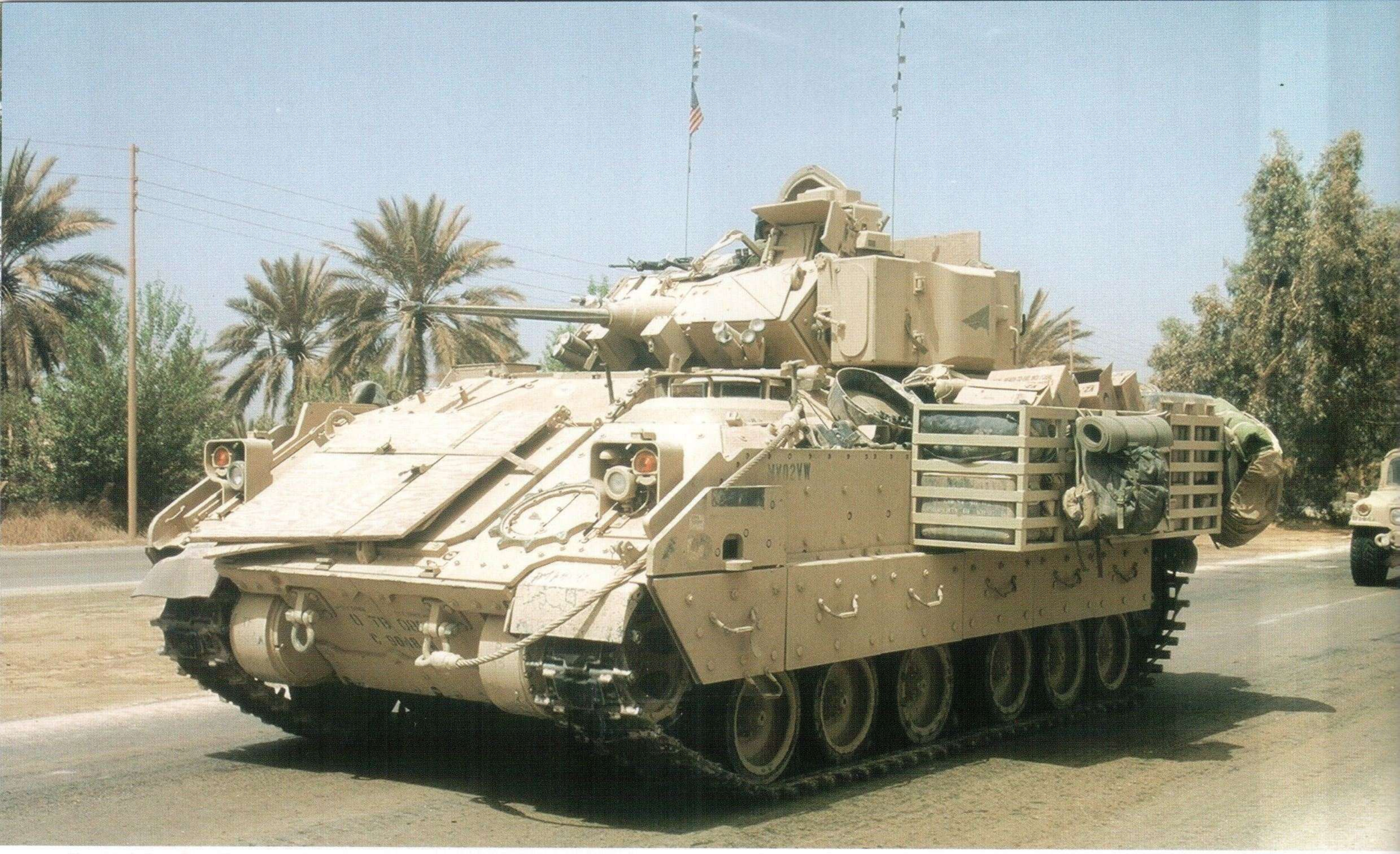
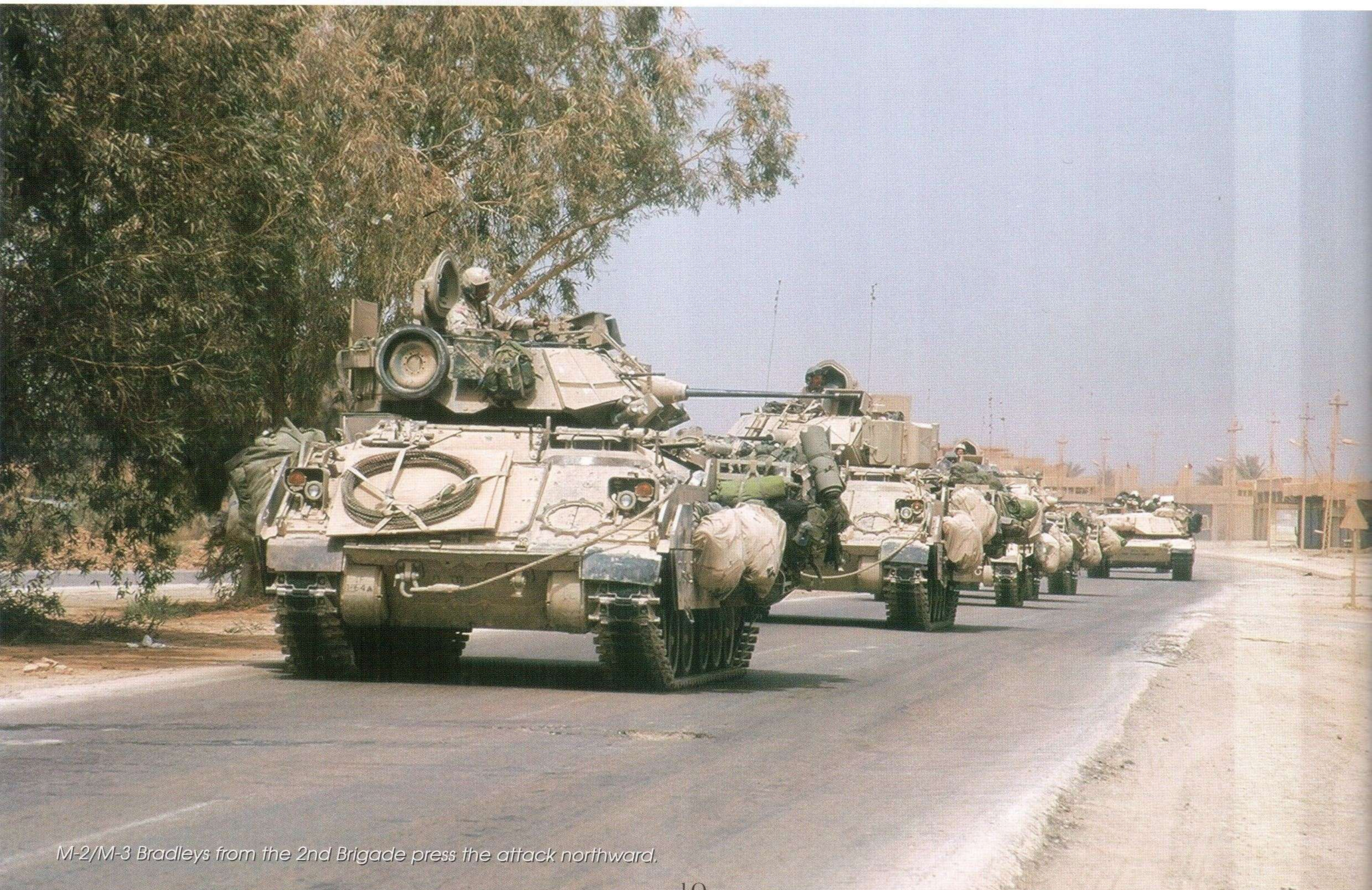
51

The three brigades of the 3rd ID are alternately and regularly deployed to the Gulf for exercises, which explains the sand-colored paint scheme on their vehicles.

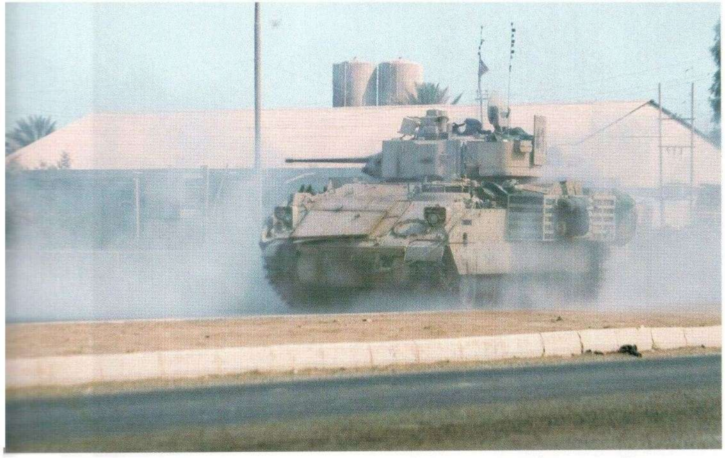
The 2nd Brigade also includes a regiment of mechanized infantry, the 3-15 Infantry, which fields 58 M-2/M-3 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, such as the one seen here.



This M-2 Bradley IFV was attached to a combat group belonging to the 1-64 Armor.

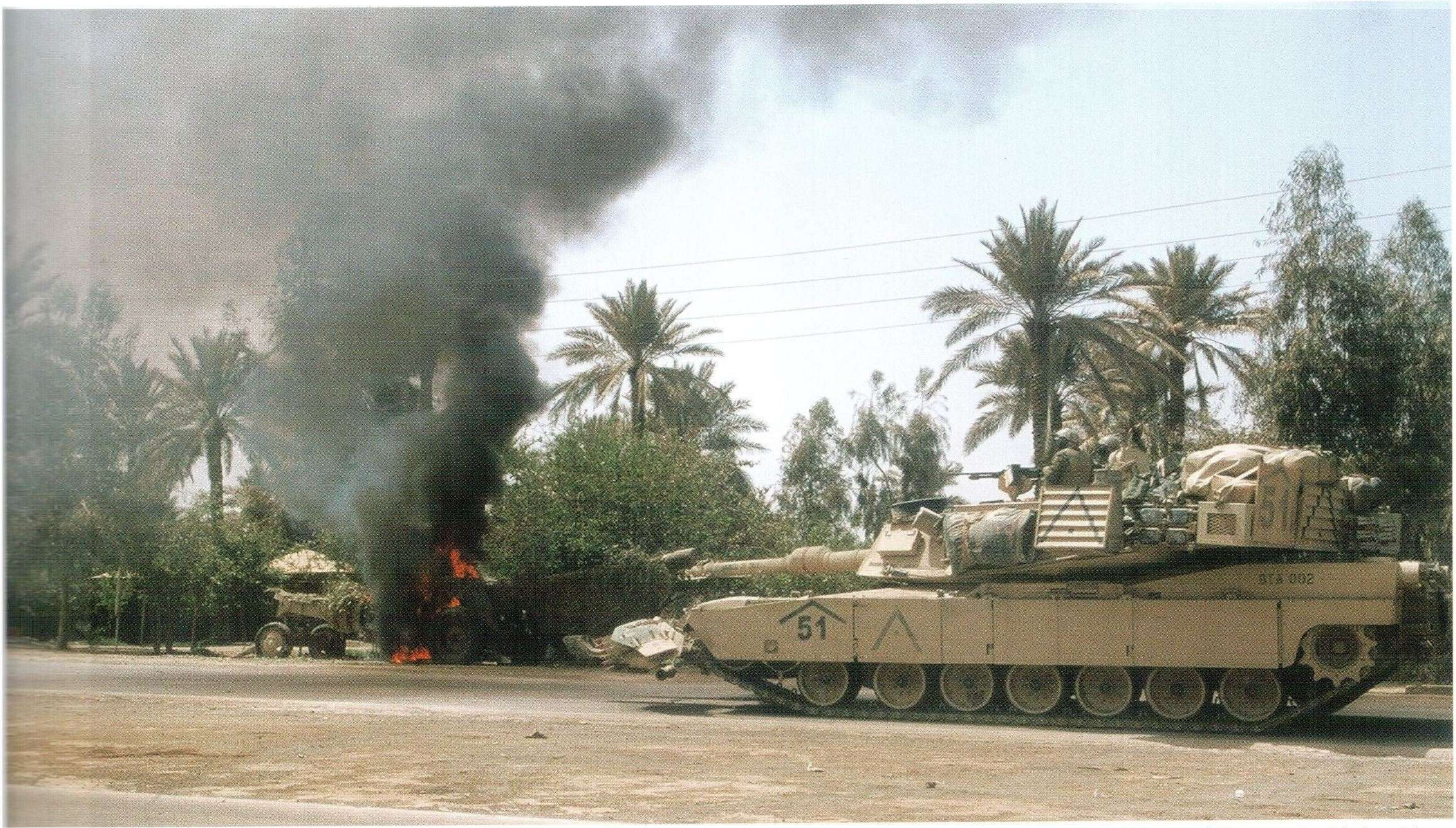


M-2/M-3 Bradleys from the 2nd Brigade press the attack northward.

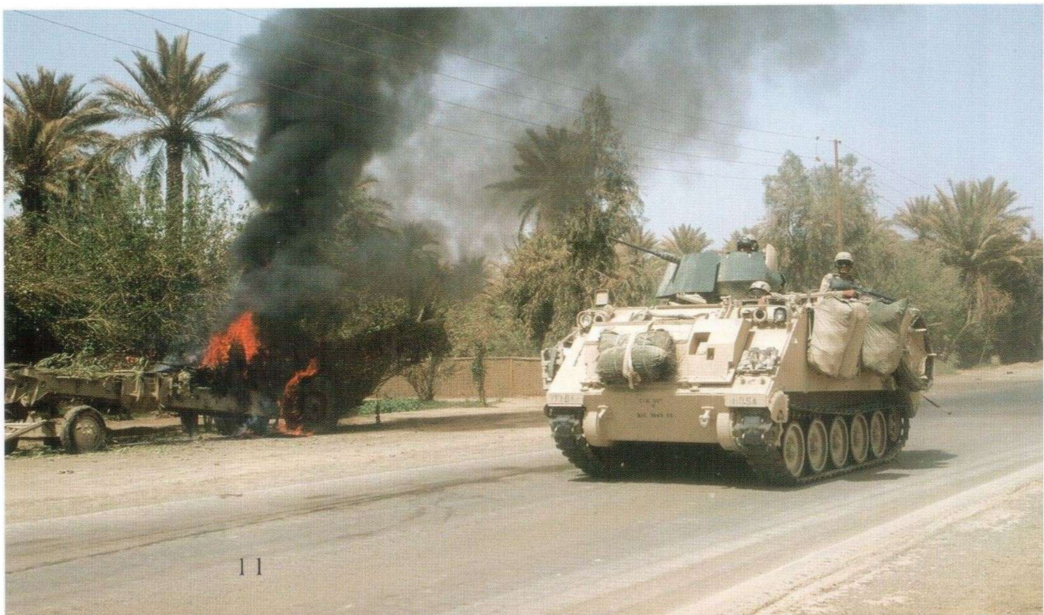


For no apparent reason, a Bradley opens fire on the open windows of a residence. The 25mm cannon on the Bradley is particularly appreciated in urban combat.

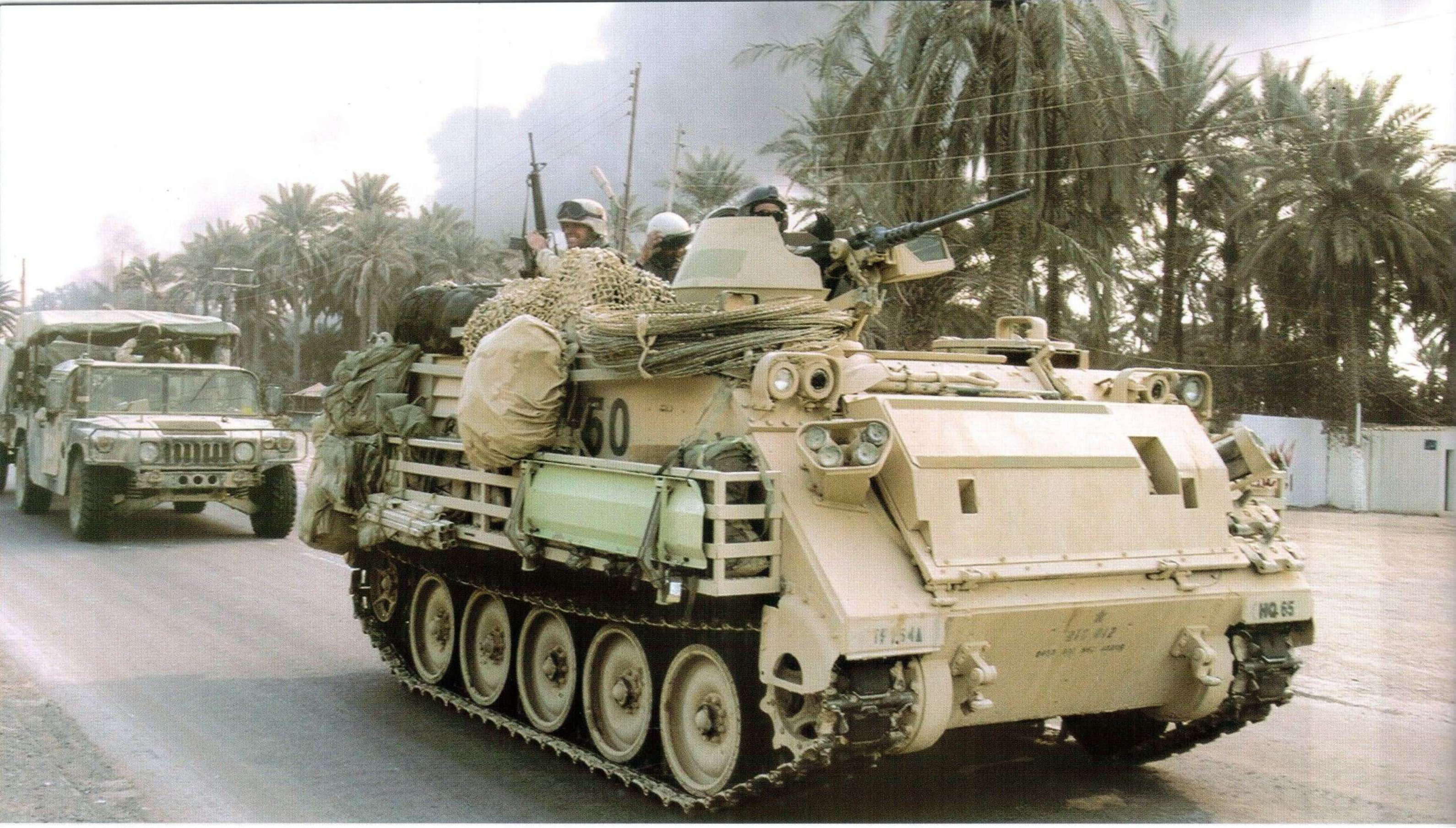
An M-1A1 sits on the opposite side of the road from a burning Iraqi M-49 130mm gun.



The inverted "V" coalition insignia is painted in several places on the M-1A1 Abrams. In both the first Gulf War and the war in Afghanistan, the black inverted "V" was used to identify vehicles belonging to the coalition forces.

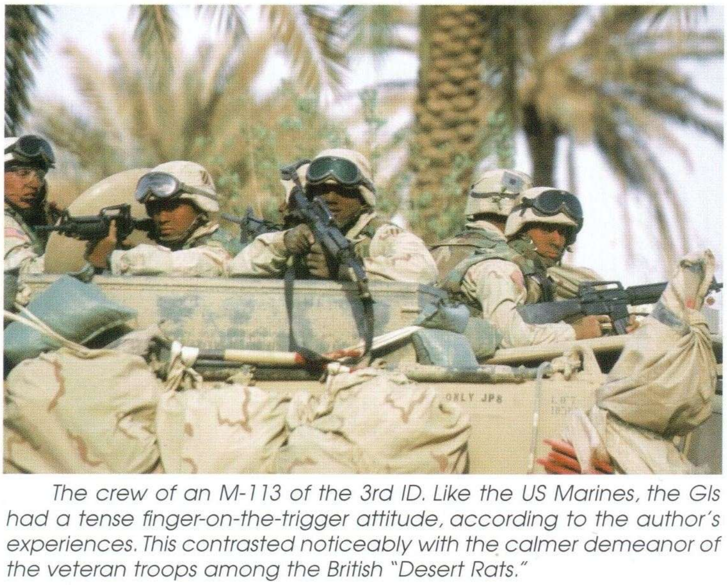


An M-113 APC passes near the M-49 gun seen in an earlier photo. A number of M-113s are still in service in the US army. This particular vehicle, which is equipped with a shield for its 12.7mm machine gun, is attached to the command post of the combat group.

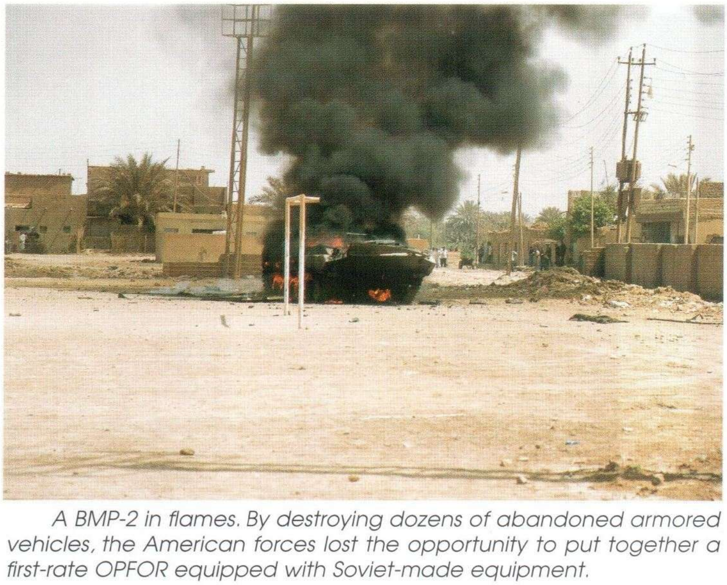


The tail of the column passes near an exploding ammunition dump.

The vehicles of the 2nd Brigade remained vulnerable to ambush as they traveled in columns, but the torrent of American fire weakened the resistance of the Iraqi forces.

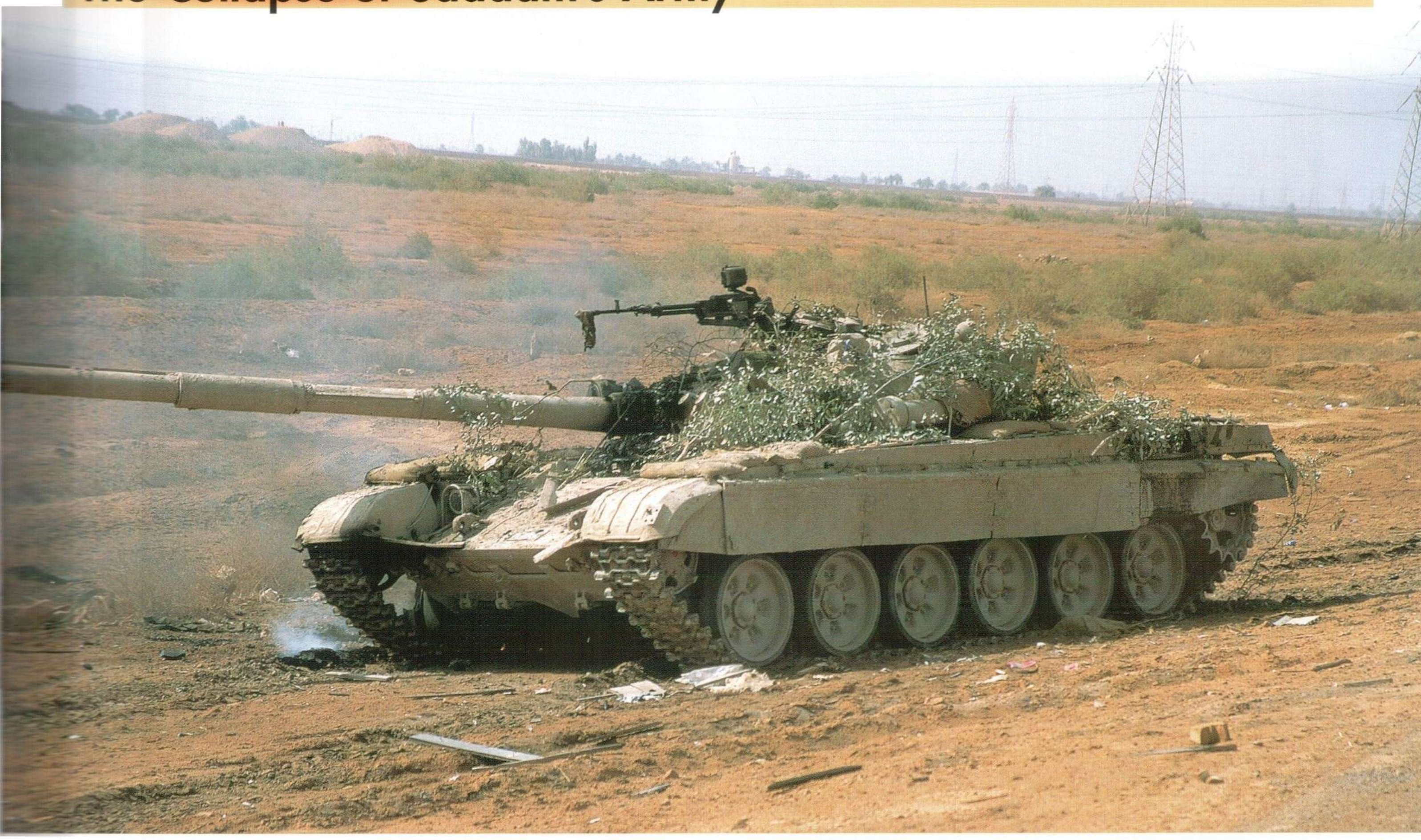


The crew of an M-113 of the 3rd ID. Like the US Marines, the GIs had a tense finger-on-the-trigger attitude, according to the author's experiences. This contrasted noticeably with the calmer demeanor of the veteran troops among the British "Desert Rats."



A BMP-2 in flames. By destroying dozens of abandoned armored vehicles, the American forces lost the opportunity to put together a first-rate OPFOR equipped with Soviet-made equipment.

The Collapse of Saddam's Army



A certain number of components of the T-72s were made locally.

In the opinion of the world press, the Americans were going to pay a heavy price to break the circle of steel drawn around Baghdad by the four divisions of the Republican Guard: Hamurabi, Baghdad, Medina, and Nida. But just like most of the regular army units, the Guard only put up scattered resistance, if any resistance at all. Only time and the cool analysis of specialists will answer the hundreds of questions regarding the lack of resistance. We make no claim to be able to solve this riddle, but our specialized journalism allows us to come up with some theories that may answer some questions.

Evidence shows that when the Iraqis tried to resist, they inflicted many losses on the coalition forces. The English and Americans had to fight their way to Basra, Nasiriyah, Najaf, and Karbala. Only their tremendous supremacy in *matériel* allowed them to seize initial objectives, sometimes causing delays in their plans.

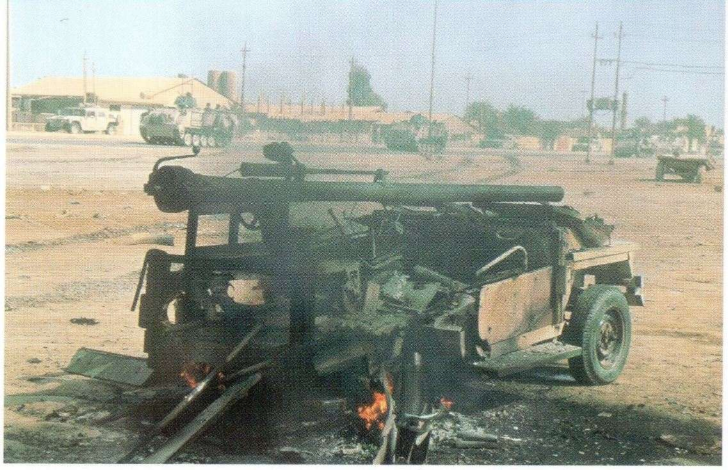
Death of a "Lion of Babylon." Iraq managed to field about 100 T-72s in relatively good condition.

Considering the dozens of tanks destroyed and buried along the roads, the question arises whether Saddam's army, which never distinguished itself with any capacity for maneuvering, even in Iran, was not a prisoner of its own tactics that it inherited from the Soviets. The tactic of "trap by fire" (maintaining a strong defensive position with lots of anti-tank and artillery fire), which worked so well for the Red Army in Kursk in 1943, was found to be suicidal in Iraq with the air supremacy enjoyed by the US forces.

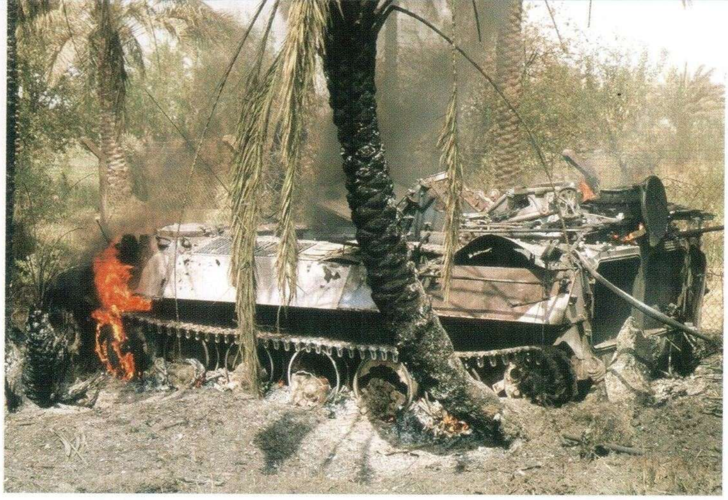
The initial destruction of the Iraqi chain of command was planned long before Operation Iraqi Freedom began . . . and the Iraqi leaders knew it! Didn't the Iraqis anticipate the strikes intended to break the connection between the leaders and the troops? A network of buried cables or simply the increased use of bicycle couriers used in earlier times would have enabled the Iraqis to reduce the efficiency of the air attacks.

Under certain conditions, a T-72 tank can destroy an Apache helicopter. The 125mm shell of the tank has a direct range of 4000 meters and an indirect range of 9000 meters when firing a high explosive shell. Hellfire missiles have a range of 4000 meters. Using dummy tanks as bait, smoke screens or other ruses, the armored units of the Guard could have at least tried to make this type of fight. The result could have been significant losses for the coalition forces. The Serbs in Kosovo had this tactic in mind to use against NATO in Kosovo. As a result, to avoid losses, NATO negotiated an entry into the province.

Launching a heavy guerilla campaign would have instilled a terrible feeling of insecurity among the enemy troops and shifted some units from the front to guard the rear. Remember, the coalition launched the Iraq



This Land Rover armed with a 106mm recoilless gun was photographed burning at Al Latifyah. It was suicidal to face an M-1 with this type of weapon. This obsolete weapon is better suited for firing at a fuel or ammunition dump or attacking a convoy.



Flaming wreckage of a MT-LB armored personnel carrier destroyed south of Al Mahmudiyah. Fitted to the back of the MT-LB was an anti-aircraft gun, probably a 14.5mm.

assault with only six divisions, and a heavy resistance could have created a crisis of manpower.

Columns of mobile 4x4s equipped with anti-tank missiles, mortars and light arms would have been able to strike the enormous fuel depots located on the Baghdad-Basra road. The same tactics apply to combat helicopters. We all know that any Iraqi MiG or Mirage trying to take off would be shot down in a minute. But what about a Mi-24 armed with a 30mm gun or a Gazelle HOT? Hidden in a grove of palm trees, these machines would have been able to take off and make short-range attacks on the columns advancing on Baghdad. One can only imagine the losses that might have been inflicted and the psychological impact they would have had on the young GIs.

No army can fight against the powerful American forces without using some imagination, but the Iraqi officer corps was deprived of any sense of initiative by the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. Also damaging was the inability of the Arab officers to pass on responsibility to his subordinates. Arab generals often take charge of everything, especially insignificant details that NCOs can normally solve.

Treason sometimes played a role at a certain level. When a colonel on a general's staff discovers that his general has deserted, he would also desert. Then the captain who finds himself without orders for his tank squadron has no choice but to send his people back to their homes. The Arab soldier does not lack courage, but at the command level there is an inferiority complex when it comes to fighting against the Western armies. Iraq is a good example of this attitude.

At the outskirts of Al Mahmudiyah, a cannonade surprises Ramdam [Iraqi solider who served as escort for the author] and me. Suddenly we find ourselves nose to nose with two tanks. Thinking at first that they were T-72s of the Republican Guard, I become afraid thinking of the A-10 I saw a few minutes earlier. They turn out to be M-1s followed by a bunch of Bradleys. They open fire everywhere. Ramdam becomes pallid and hides his army papers behind the glove compartment in my car. He tries to bolt from the car, but I take him by the shoulders and sit him back down. I make him understand that if the Americans see someone leaving a car with the classic look of an Iraqi, he would be a dead man. Fortunately, my car is red with French flags on it and it bears the letters "TV" in tape on the side. Waving, I get out of the car to take photos. A Bradley directs its 25mm gun at my 4x4, but immediately lowers it to spray a palm grove. I have just made the acquaintance of one of the columns of the 3rd ID.

Once the fire-spitting convoy passed by, we breathe a little easier. I smile at my "jailer" (who never made me feel like a prisoner). Like a good soldier, Ramdam, who does not speak particularly good English, tells me that his mission is to take me to Baghdad. Starting out again, we by-pass the destroyed center of town by taking a road that circles the town. To the north we see what appears to be Bradleys and M-1s. The road to the capital is now cut.

Near the wreckage of a T-72, which has the charred corpse of a crewmember lying in front of it, a large man appears. By a miracle, he speaks English. I explain to Ramdam that given all the setbacks I suffered with the Americans, I cannot hope to follow their advance as a "wildcat" reporter with one of Saddam's secret servicemen tagging along with me. Ramdam says he is going to tempt fate by following the railroad, just as a stream of dozens of refugees were doing. I slide a 20-dollar bank note into his pocket and we say our good-byes. Having found my freedom, I decide to join the infernal column south of the city to take some pictures. Their trail is easy to follow; columns of smoke and burning vehicles mark the route.

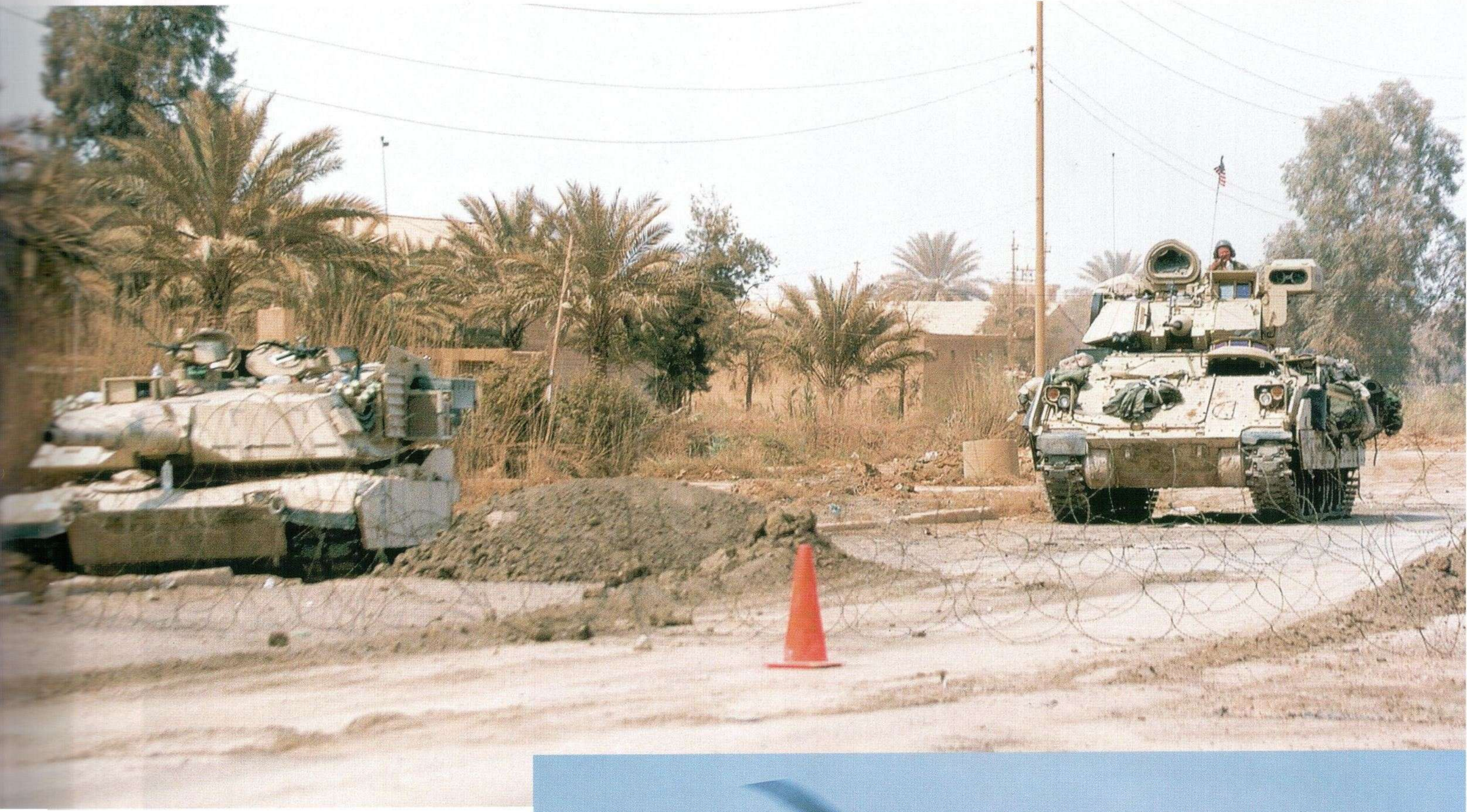
At Al Latifyah, I meet up with the armored vehicles of 1-64 Armor Regiment. M-1s and Bradleys are firing at anything that moves. The entire column makes a half-turn without ceasing fire. Seemingly without reason, one Bradley opens fire on a house with open windows.

At 1630, I am on an enormous oven of a highway 20 kilometers south of Baghdad. I track down a brigade HQ and decide to spend the night nearby. I approach an M-1 that is guarding the crossroads and, after the traditional warning shot and the usual circus, I move close to a lieutenant. He asks authorization for one "crazy Frenchman" to shelter himself for the night in the defensive circle. Half an hour later, I am looking at four M-577s, which represent the brigade HQ. The PIO receives me with neither hostility nor warmth. "You are not embedded, but you can stay here for the night," he says. I settle down some distance from them, near a country villa owned by a wealthy Baghdadi.

I take a moment to assess my situation. One of the moukhabarat [Iraqi secret service man] stole my binoculars, my compass and my Mag light. Fortunately, my camera and film are still with me. A lot of food had disappeared, too, including my last can of ravioli, which I was keeping for the entrance into Baghdad.

In the evening, two mortar shells fall nearby. A Bradley crew then asks me to move my car closer to them for the night.

MEDEVAC in the 3rd Infantry Division



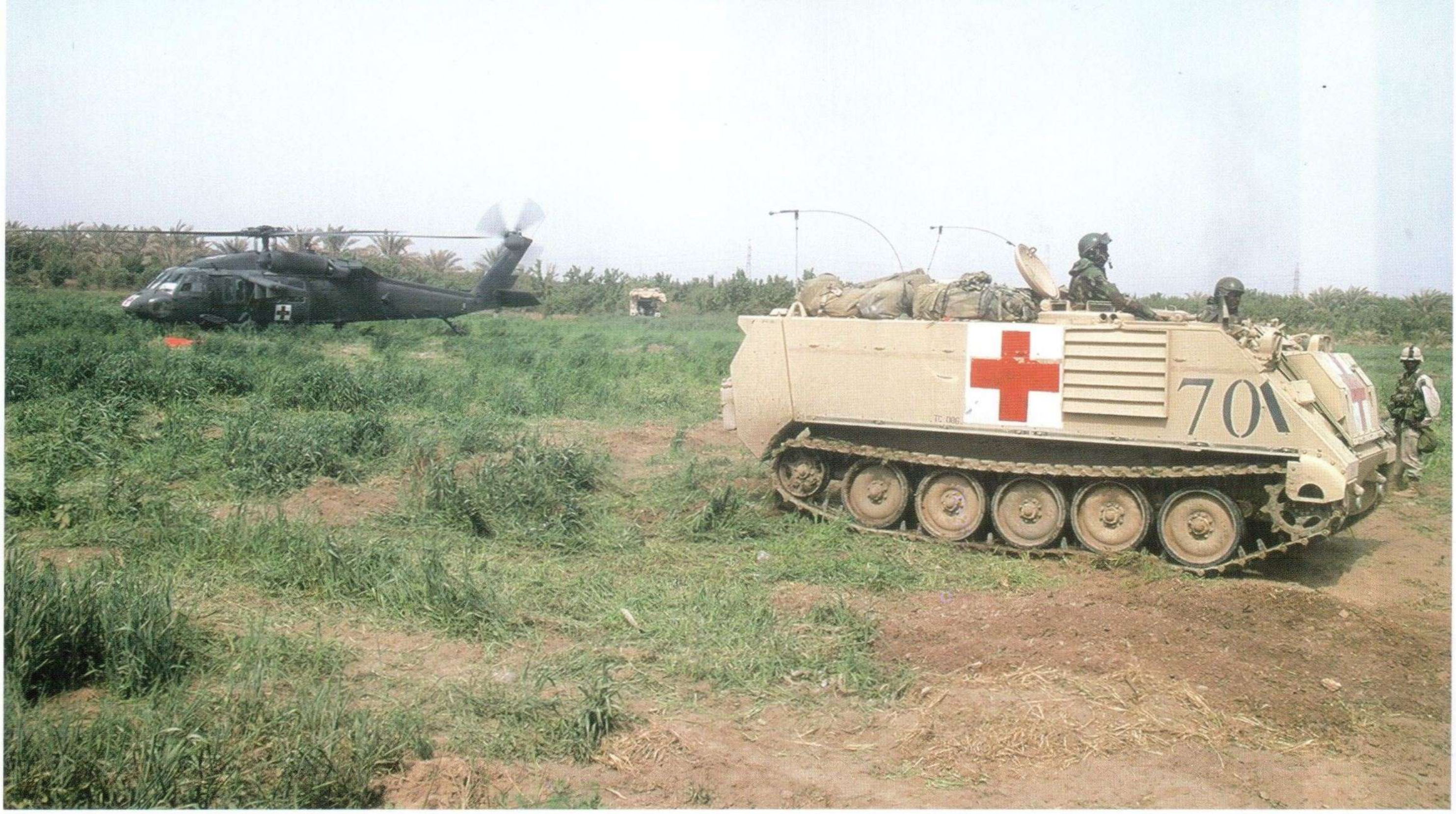
An M-1A1 tank and a Bradley IFV are positioned at the entrance to a checkpoint. Facing the threat of suicide car attacks, the soldiers stationed at this post are understandably nervous.

Rotations of flights by UH-60 Black Hawks belonging to a medical unit transport soldiers wounded during the fight for Baghdad.

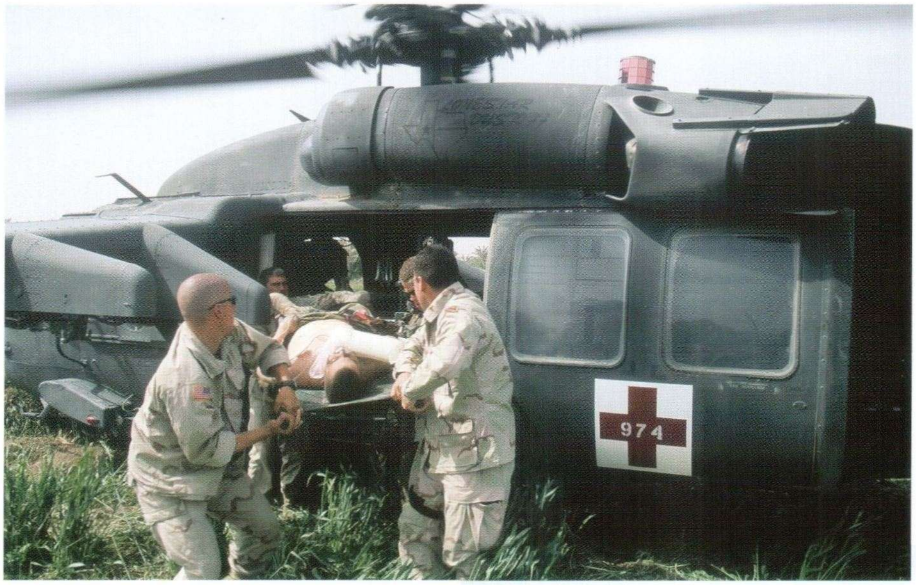
A UH-60 touches down long enough for the wounded to be taken away, then it will lift off to perform further medical evacuation.

On 5 April at about 1000, escorted by two Apaches, two UH-60s of a heliborne medical evacuation company land at the HQ of the 2nd Brigade of the 3rd Infantry Division north of Al Mahmudiyah. Four soldiers have just been wounded, one of them seriously in the head. The day before, a captain was killed by "friendly fire" about 100 meters from there. Other losses were three M-113 crewmembers that were drowned when their vehicle overturned in a canal. That is a lot for two days. The next day, an Iraqi rocket would fall in the middle of the brigade HQ. Two journalists were killed and 17 vehicles destroyed.

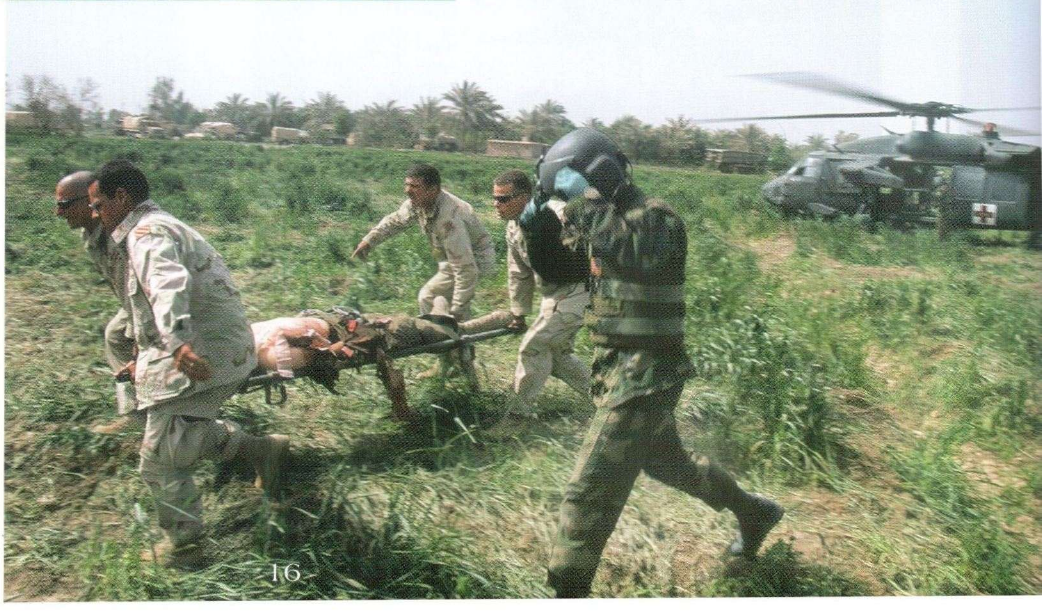
The official US Army report said 125 troops were lost during the campaign. A reliable source announced more than fifty medevac flights to Nasiriyah at the beginning of the campaign.



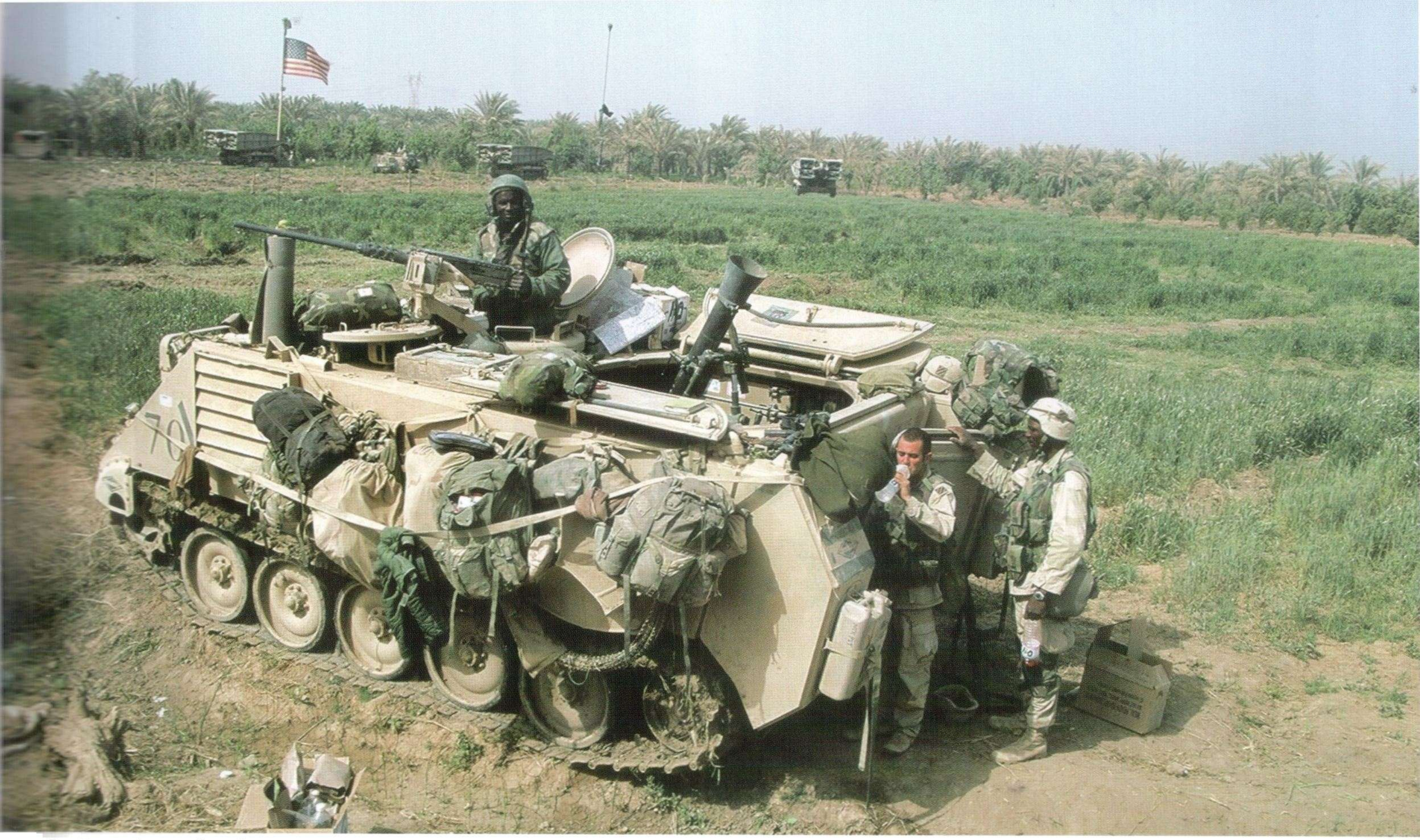
Once they are removed from the UH-60, the wounded are loaded onto a medical M-113, which drives them to the first aid post near the brigade HQ.



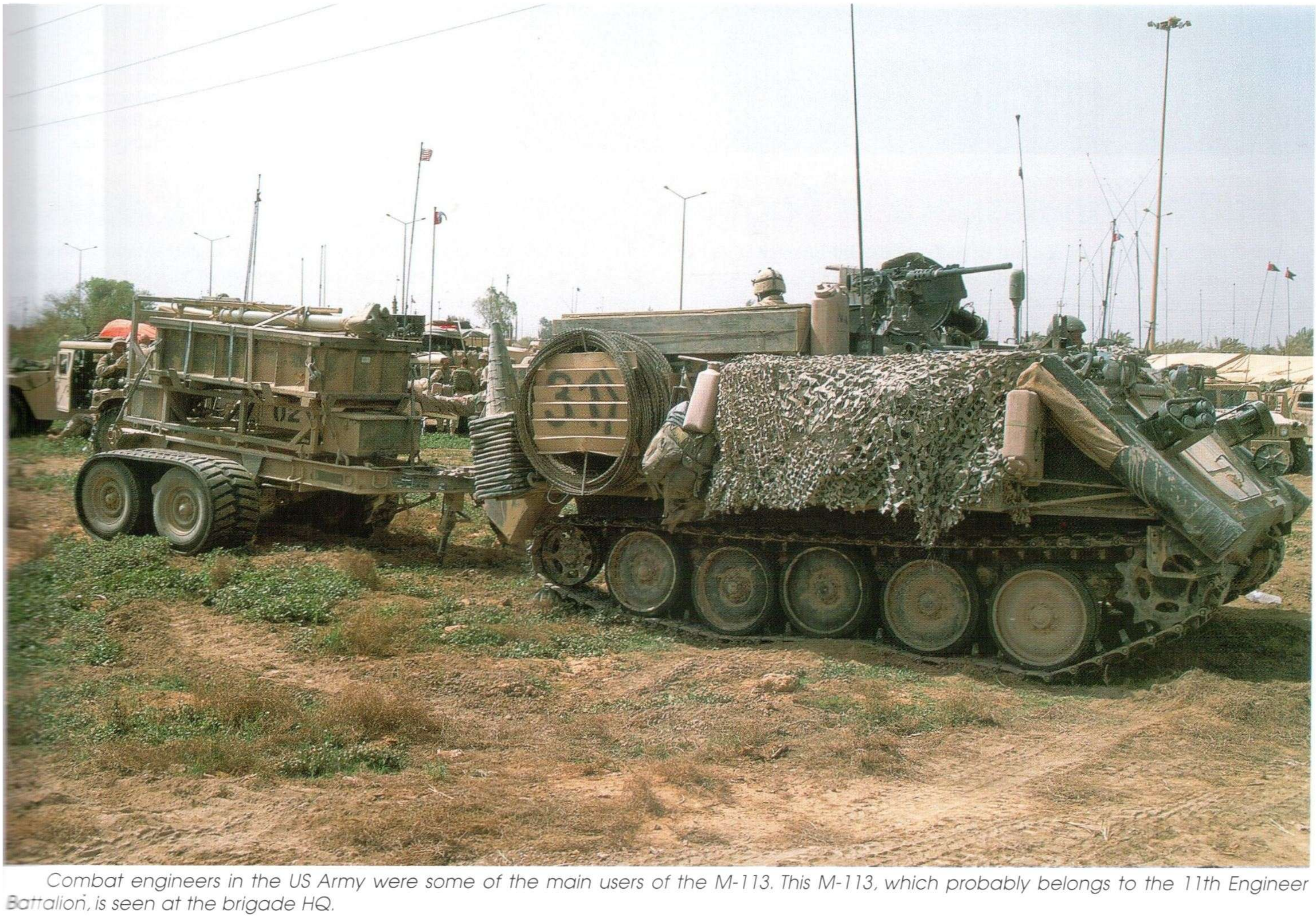
Troops from the medical unit carefully remove a wounded soldier from the Black Hawk medevac helicopter.



A crewmember from the UH-60 accompanies the four men as they transport a wounded soldier. Once at the first aid post, the wounded soldier will receive necessary care until he is ready to be evacuated to a hospital behind the lines.

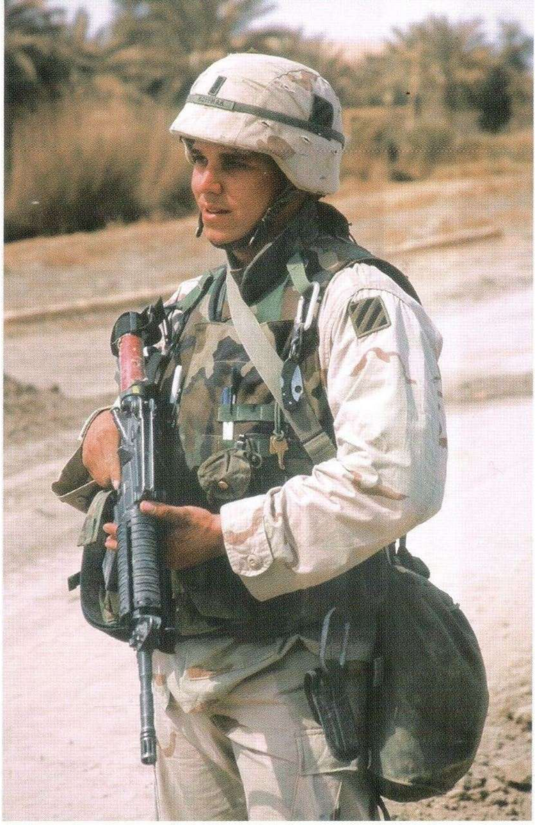


Positioned near the drop zone where medevac helicopters land is an M-113 armed with a 120mm mortar that is ready to fire.



Combat engineers in the US Army were some of the main users of the M-113. This M-113, which probably belongs to the 11th Engineer Battalion, is seen at the brigade HQ.

The young GIs of the 3rd Infantry Division belong to a unit famous for fighting at the Marne River in 1918, as well as for their participation in the combat in Italy in 1944 and in Korea.



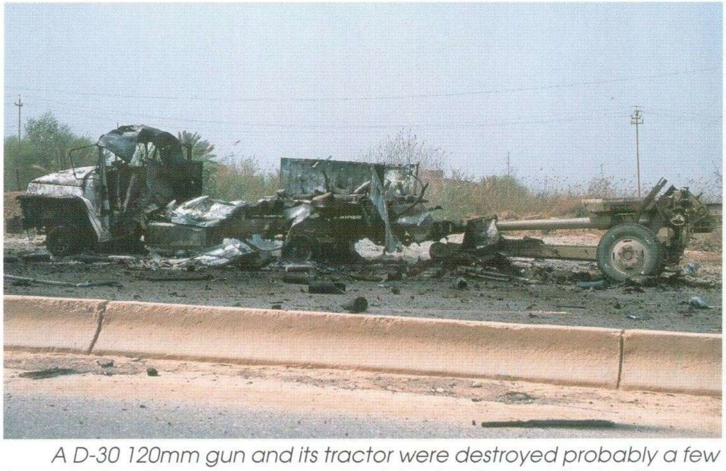
This GI wears the subdued badge of the 3rd ID on both his helmet cover and shoulder. The insignia is one of the most distinctive seen during the Iraq campaign.

A forest of antennae at the brigade HQ are silhouetted by the sunset of 6 April. The real battle for Baghdad would begin the following day.

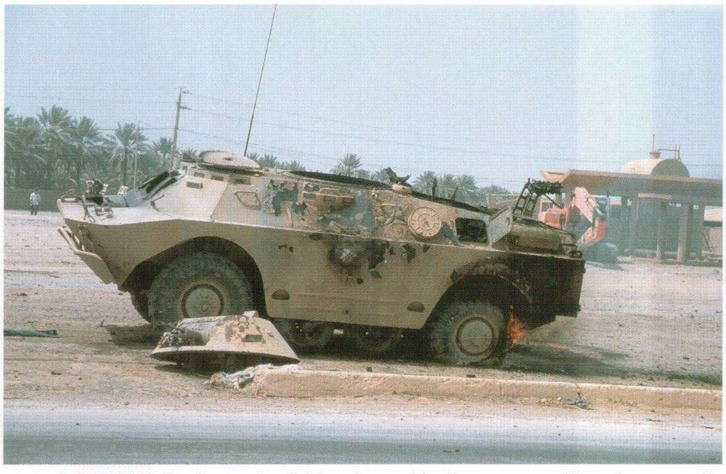
Fire Reconnaissance in Baghdad

On 5 April, while the 1st and 3rd Brigades of the 3rd Infantry Division were involved in tough fighting to take control of Saddam Hussein Airport 20 kilometers west of Baghdad, the 2nd Brigade launched one of its "infernal columns" into the southwestern suburbs. After clearing a roadblock manned by the 3-15 Infantry, the armored vehicles made their way to the neighborhoods of Al Dorah and Yamouk on the west bank of the Tigris River. The Bradleys and Abrams destroyed two abandoned BRDM-2s and BMP-2s, as well as some towed artillery pieces.

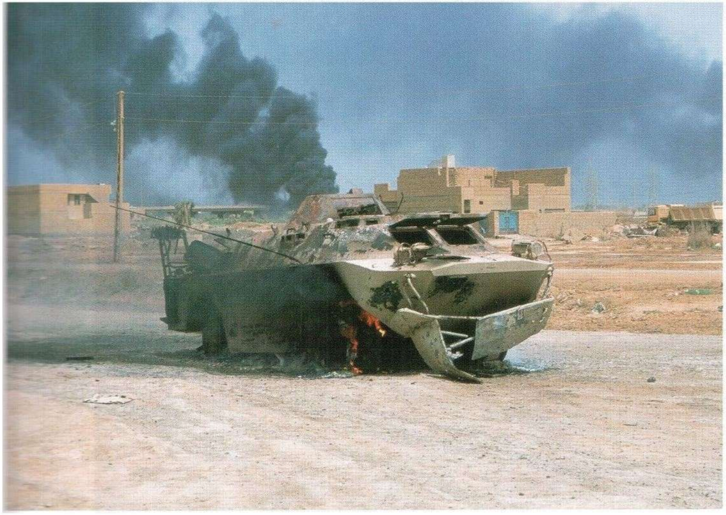
At one major crossroad, the Americans met some resistance, losing an M-1A1 and a Humvee. With the assistance of air support, the column pushed on to the airport to hook up with other brigades. As proof that the Iraqis could inflict some damage if they put their minds to it, an MLRS rocket fell on the HQ of 2nd Brigade, killing two embedded journalists and three soldiers and destroying a large number of vehicles (between 17 and 24).



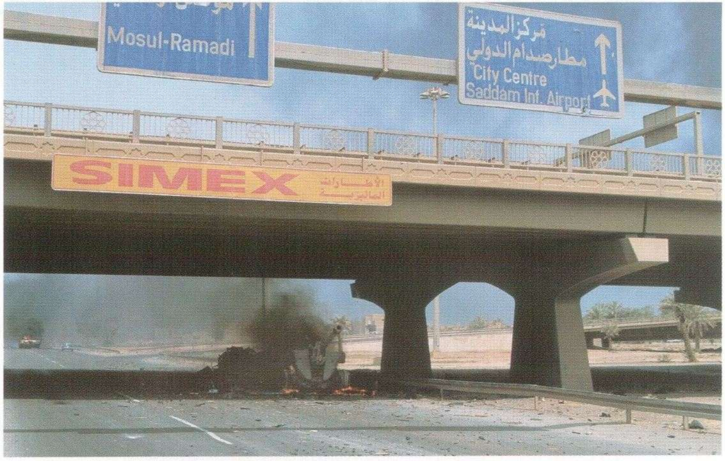
A D-30 120mm gun and its tractor were destroyed probably a few hours before the column passed judging by the fact that neither the gun nor the vehicle are burning.



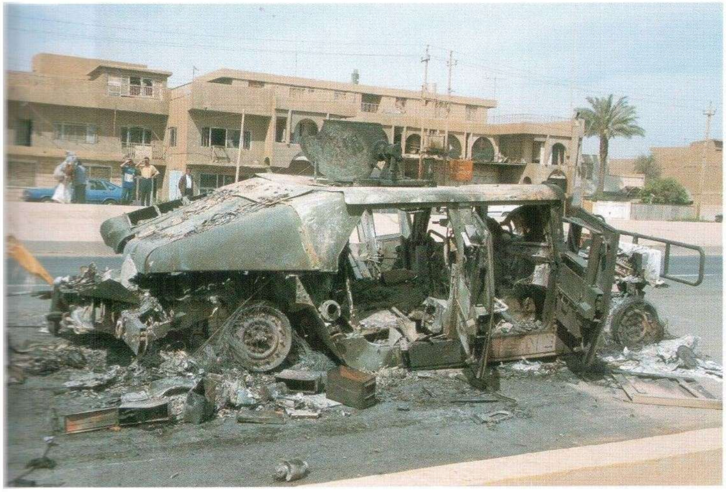
A BRDM-2 that was foolishly placed in the open without cover sits abandoned at a crossroad at the entrance to Baghdad.



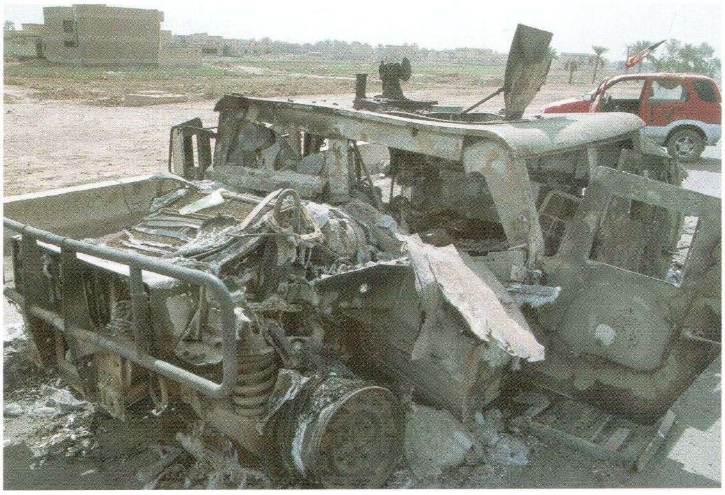
The M-1A1s of the 1-64 Armor immediately destroyed armored reconnaissance vehicles such as this BRDM-2.



An Iraqi 152mm gun an its towing truck are engulfed in flames beneath the bridge that serves as the large western crossroad for Baghdad. Three hundred meters from this spot, another vehicle was burning. This time it was a US M-1A1 tank.

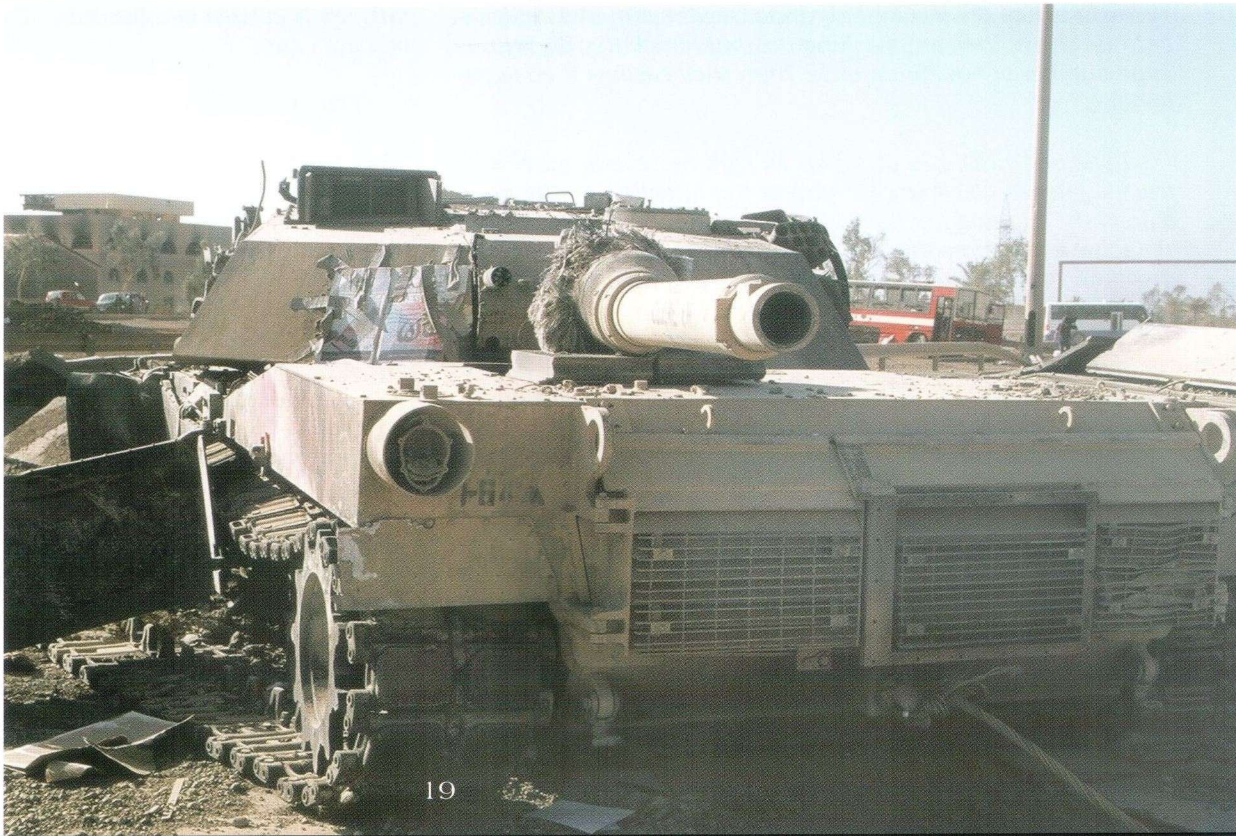


Six hundred meters from the destroyed M-1A1 was the wreckage of another US vehicle – a Humvee.

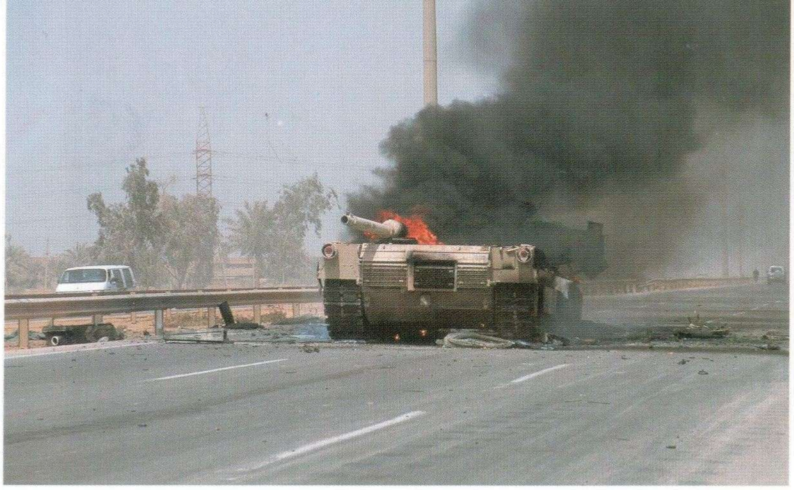


The fate of the crew of this derelict Humvee is unknown. The IR identification panel lies on the ground next to the vehicle.

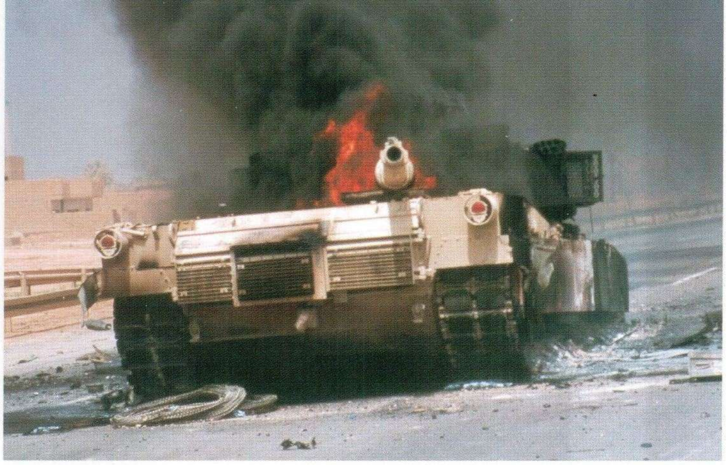
Death of an Abrams



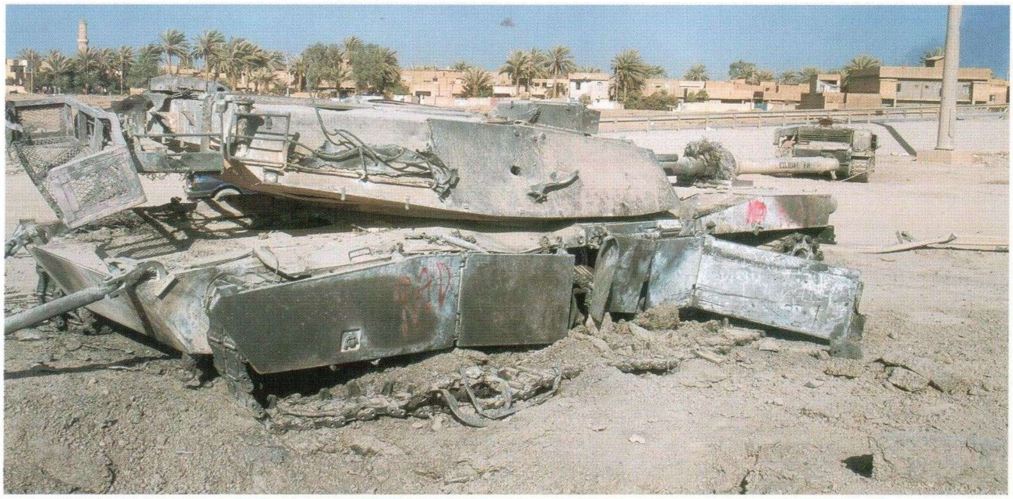
View of the M-1A1 "Cajones Eh" on 11 April, six days after its destruction. The Iraqis also tried to tow the tank, but were unsuccessful. A small hole from an ATK missile is visible on the side of the turret. The letters "RAD" painted in red on the front right of the tank warns of radioactivity, probably originating from the depleted uranium in the armor. (Enigma: If this is indeed the same M-1 seen in the other photos, why is there a "1-64" and "C-12" stenciled on the front of the tank in this photo when they were not there when the tank was burning? Also, there was a black exhaust stain on the front of the burning tank that is not there in this photo?)



An M-1A1 Abrams named "Cajones Eh" burns in the suburb of Yarmouk. The fire started because a turbine overheated.



The crewmembers, who tried to extinguish the fire, were probably killed, though this was not confirmed. The Iraqis fired an anti-tank missile that hit the M-1A1.



The Americans tried to recover the damaged M-1A1, but another round from a 106mm recoilless gun apparently destroyed some of the road wheels. Due to the intensity of the fighting, the Americans were forced to abandon the tank.

From a far distance, I follow the column of the 2nd Brigade, getting closer and closer to Baghdad driving on a four-lane highway. It is 5 April, about 1030. The streets are empty, but I hear the sound of an intense battle several kilometers ahead. Exercising great caution, I try to locate the fighting. (I remember that yesterday a similar column was firing in all directions, and I am too scared to get closer.) I think I am about two or three kilometers from the last tank. I cannot see the armored vehicles because the houses are masking me, but I track the GIs by the large number of hot 25mm or 12.7mm shell casings they leave behind.

I see two BRDM-2s burning, as well as several guns and trucks. Intense black smoke attracts my attention on the right side of the highway crossing. I don't know which way to go. (Imagine a man from the Midwest coming to Los Angeles for the first time, and arriving in the middle of heavy fighting.) I decide to go straight under the bridge because I see a sign that says "Baghdad Airport" and I know that some combat is taking place there. Under the bridge, a 152mm gun and its tractor are in flames. The smoke obscures my view. I have no choice but to get closer, scared stiff and praying that the ammunition does not explode. Through the smoke, I see another vehicle burning beyond the bridge.

"Damn! It's an M-1 that's burning," I say to myself.

I immediately recognize the rear of the American tank by it characteristic horizontal exhaust grill. The turret is nearly at a 6 o'clock position. An intense fire is devouring the rear of the tank. I immediately stop my car on the side of the road and take a look around the tank. Incredibly, I don't see one GI. Normally, the Americans do not leave equipment behind. I was also surprised to see some civilian cars were driving in the area, including a pick-up truck full of mujahadeen armed to the teeth with RPGs. Quickly I take some pictures of the burning tank. This place could get very dangerous very soon. The Americans will probably try to recover or destroy their tank.

When I get back to my car, a 4x4 carrying Iraqi soldiers pulls up. A colonel in a black beret and a camouflage suit asks me who I am.

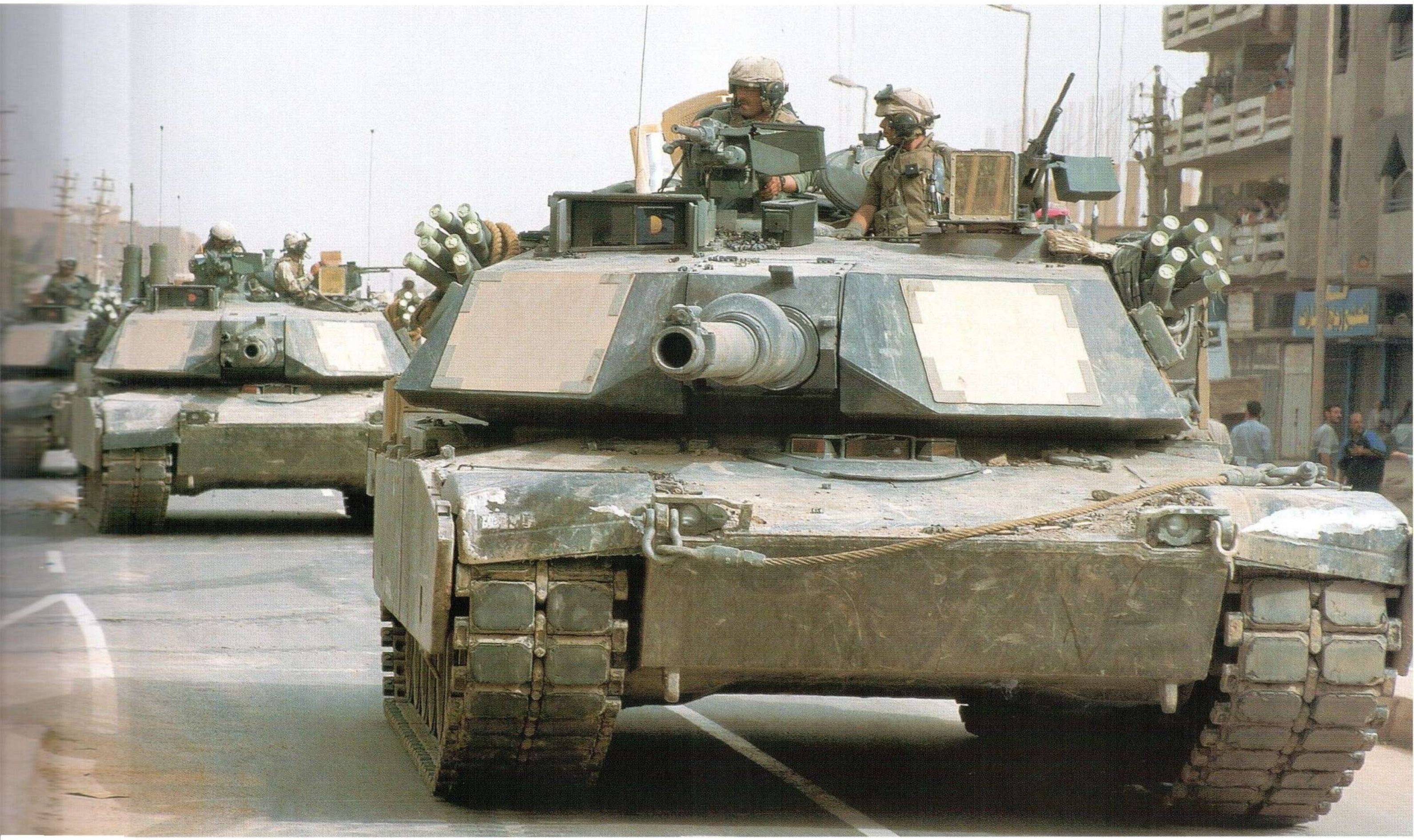
"French press!" I reply. "Did you destroy this tank?" I ask.

"French TV? Very good, mister, very good," he responds. "Yes, we destroy the tank," he offers. "Five American soldiers killed. Please don't stay here," he warns. "Very dangerous, mister, very dangerous."

With a big smile, he gestures with his hand for me to go. I do not really want to stay in the area. Five hundred meters away, I see a destroyed pick-up fitted with a TOW. This is probably the kind of weapon that destroyed the M-1.

Twenty minutes later, I am stopped by some Fedayeen troops. They are a bit nervous, but I manage to keep them from touching my camera. Suddenly we hear a series of explosions coming from the south. It is probably the 3rd ID destroying the M-1. In the bottom of my pocket, I feel the roll of film that has documented the demise of that tank. Naturally, I would like to have learned more about the death of the M-1, but in time of war, time is very short. Because of the smoke, I could not take pictures of the side of the tank. But if I had waited around until I could, I would have been a caramelized mass at the bottom of a bomb crater when the US Air Force tried to destroy the wreck.

The Marines Enter Baghdad

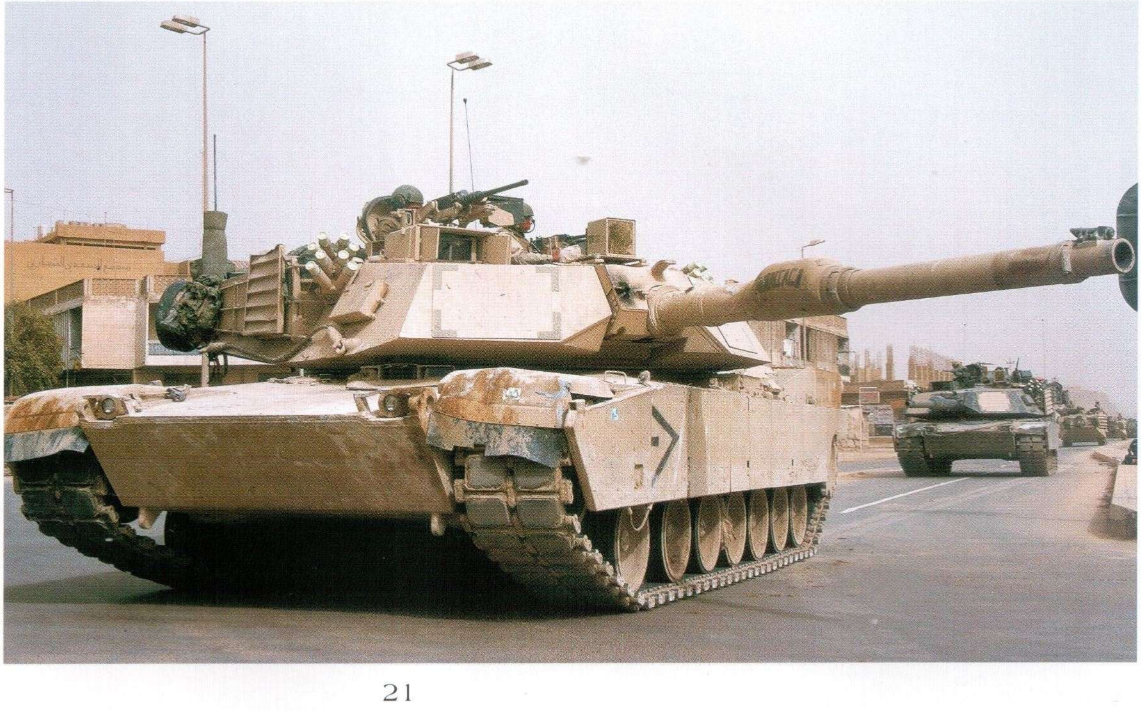


As usual, the M-1A1 Abrams, well protected by its armor, is at the head of the column as the Marines enter Baghdad.

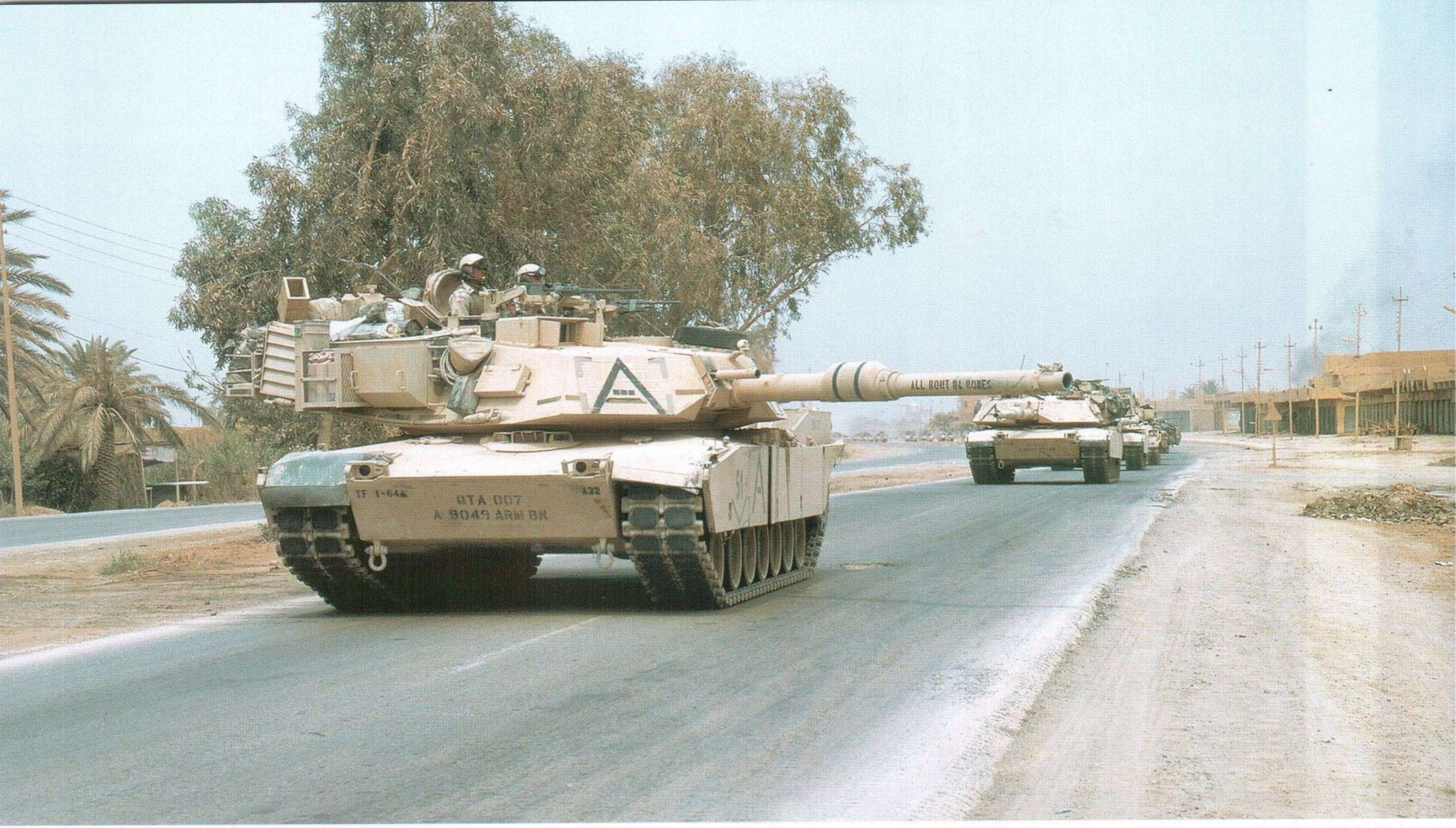
It is 9 April 2003. Coming up from the south via the Tigris Valley, the Marines approached Baghdad from the southwest. Under the cameras of the embedded journalists, two bridges are taken following combat that is described as "fierce". [The author distrusts the "militaro-journalistic" vocabulary of certain colleagues who for lack of military knowledge tend to confuse a simple reconnaissance with the Battle of Stalingrad.]

Next the Marines seized the military airport at Al Rasheed, which fell without resistance. From there, the 2/5 and 3/5 Marines assaulted the districts of Khansa and Al-Azamiya, whose possession allowed them to close the circle around the capital city. Elements of the 3/4 Marines headed for downtown. A column of Amtracs and M-1A1s arrived in the center of town by way of Mascara Boulevard. For this special occasion, some of the Marines dressed in their new desert camouflage uniforms.

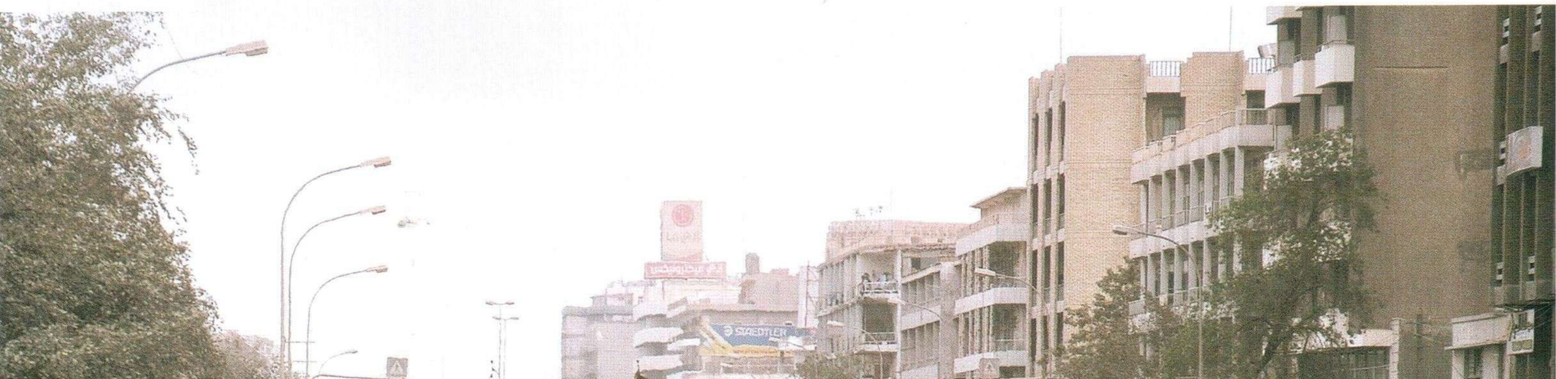
The demeanor of the "leathernecks" was also changed. Though they were still alert and ready to fire, they seemed more relaxed than during the advance on Baghdad. Some isolated gunshots were heard, but systematic recognition by fire no longer took place.



The 1st Marine Tank Battalion had the honor to be the first ones to enter the city of Baghdad. Note the wear to the skates on the treads.


ALL BOUT DA BONES
TF 1-64A
QTA 007
A 9049 ARM BN
A32

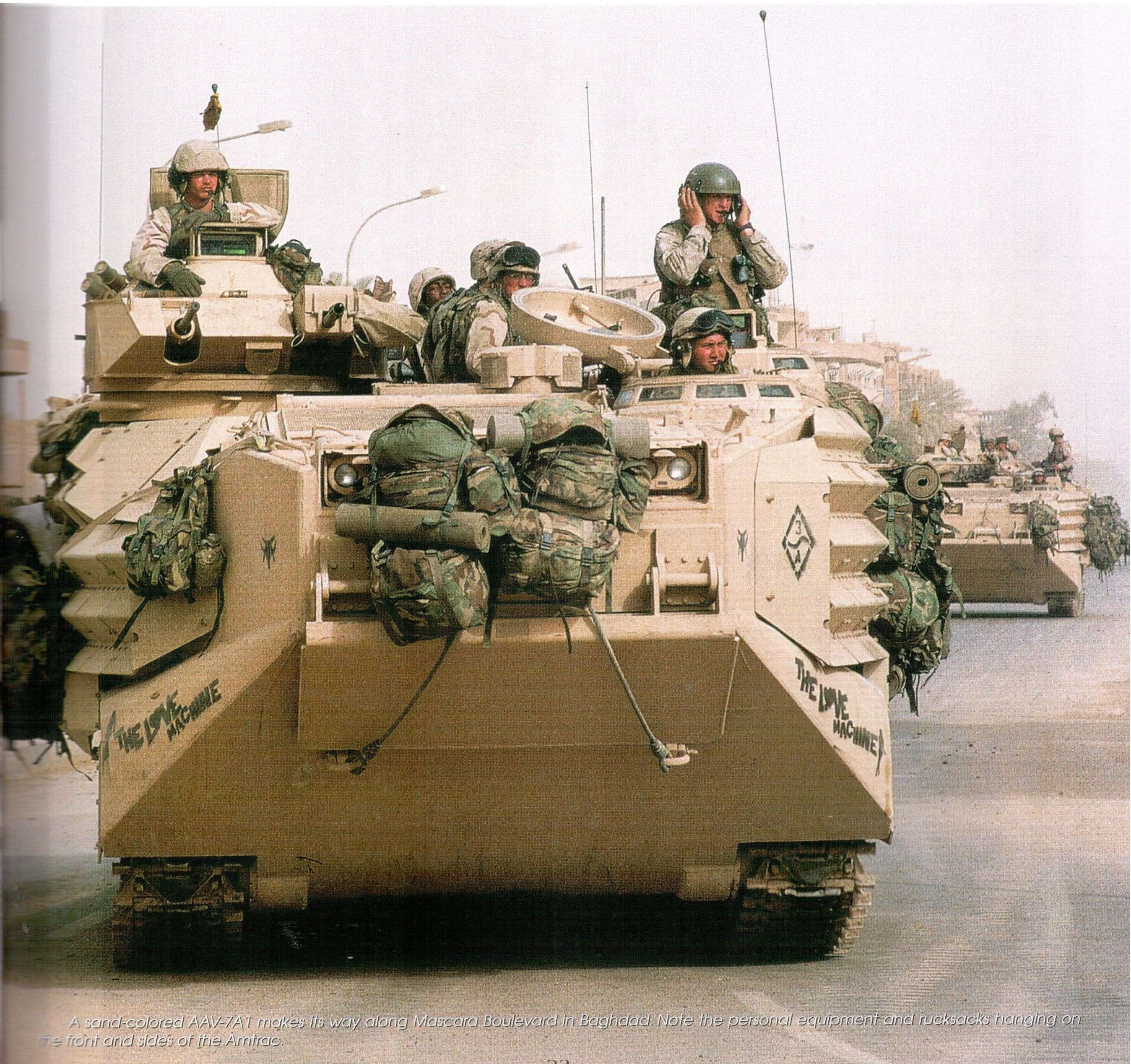
With the exception of its turbines overheating, the M-1A1 tank performed remarkably well during the advance on Baghdad. It is true, though, that the M-1A1 served more as an infantry support vehicle rather than an aggressor; the T-72s of the Republican Guard offered practically no resistance.



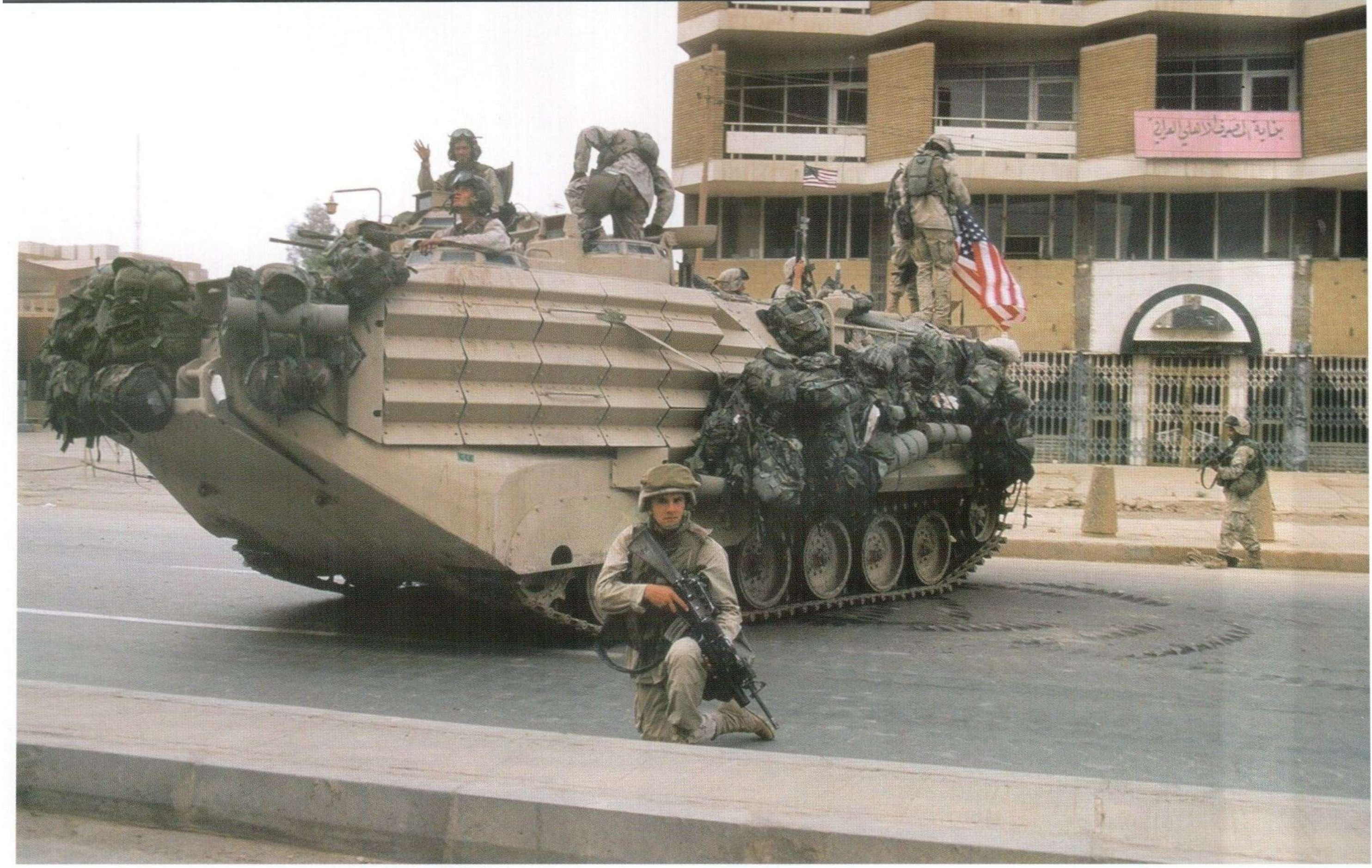
Company I of the 3/4 Marines travels down Mascara Boulevard toward the Place of July 14 or Place of Paradise.

Some of the Marines put on their new camouflage uniforms, which they had kept in reserve specifically to celebrate their entry into Baghdad.

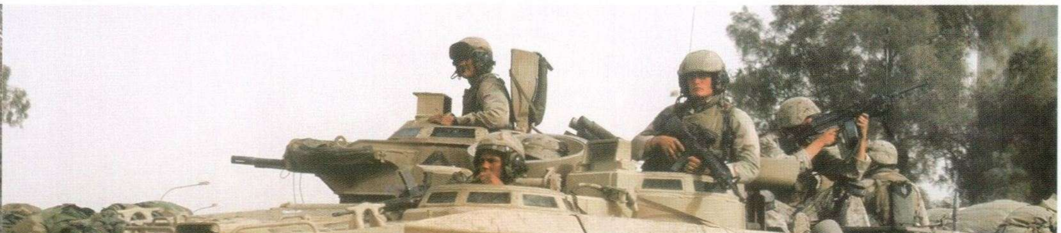
Sitting atop an AAV-7A1, Marines from Company I of the 3/4 Marines keep a lookout for any suspicious activity as they enter Baghdad.



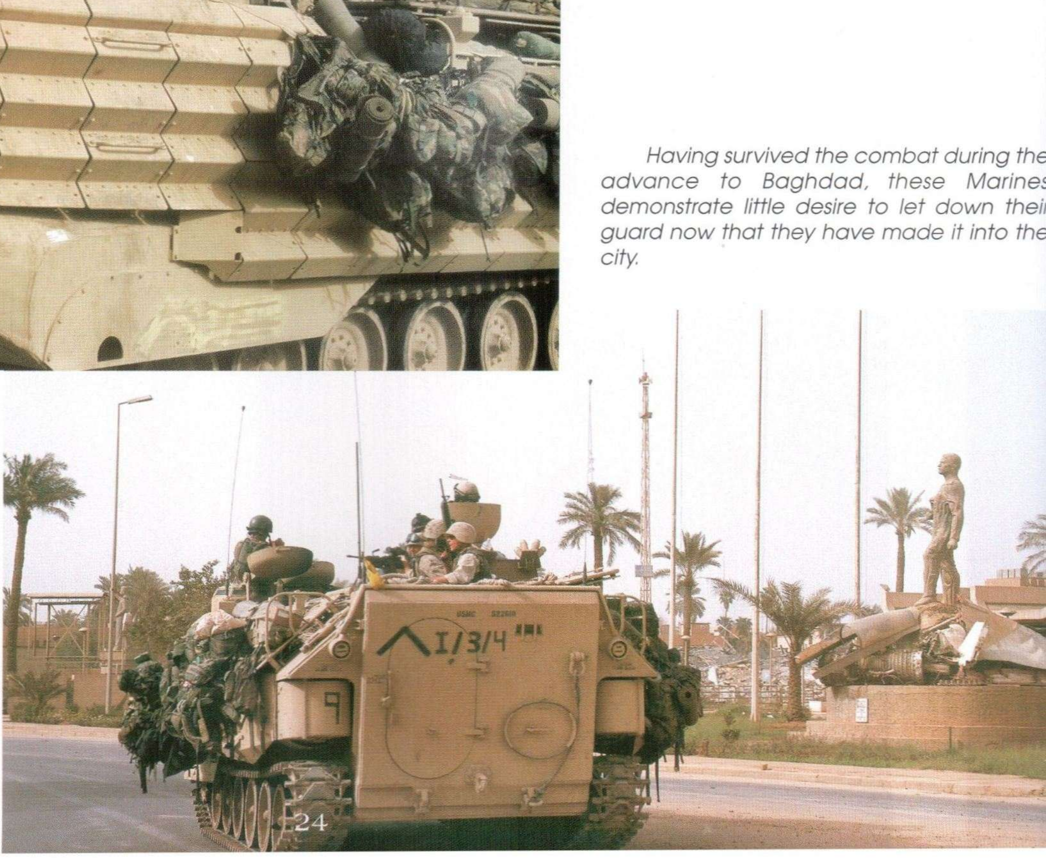
A sand-colored AAV-7A1 makes its way along Mascara Boulevard in Baghdad. Note the personal equipment and rucksacks hanging on the front and sides of the Amtrac.



A comrade unfurls an American flag at the back of an Amtrac while fellow Marines keep a sharp vigil after arriving in Baghdad.



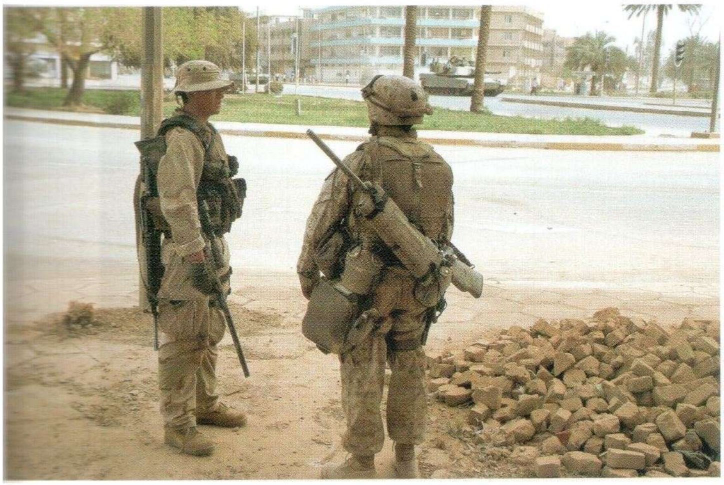
Having survived the combat during the advance to Baghdad, these Marines demonstrate little desire to let down thei guard now that they have made it into the city.



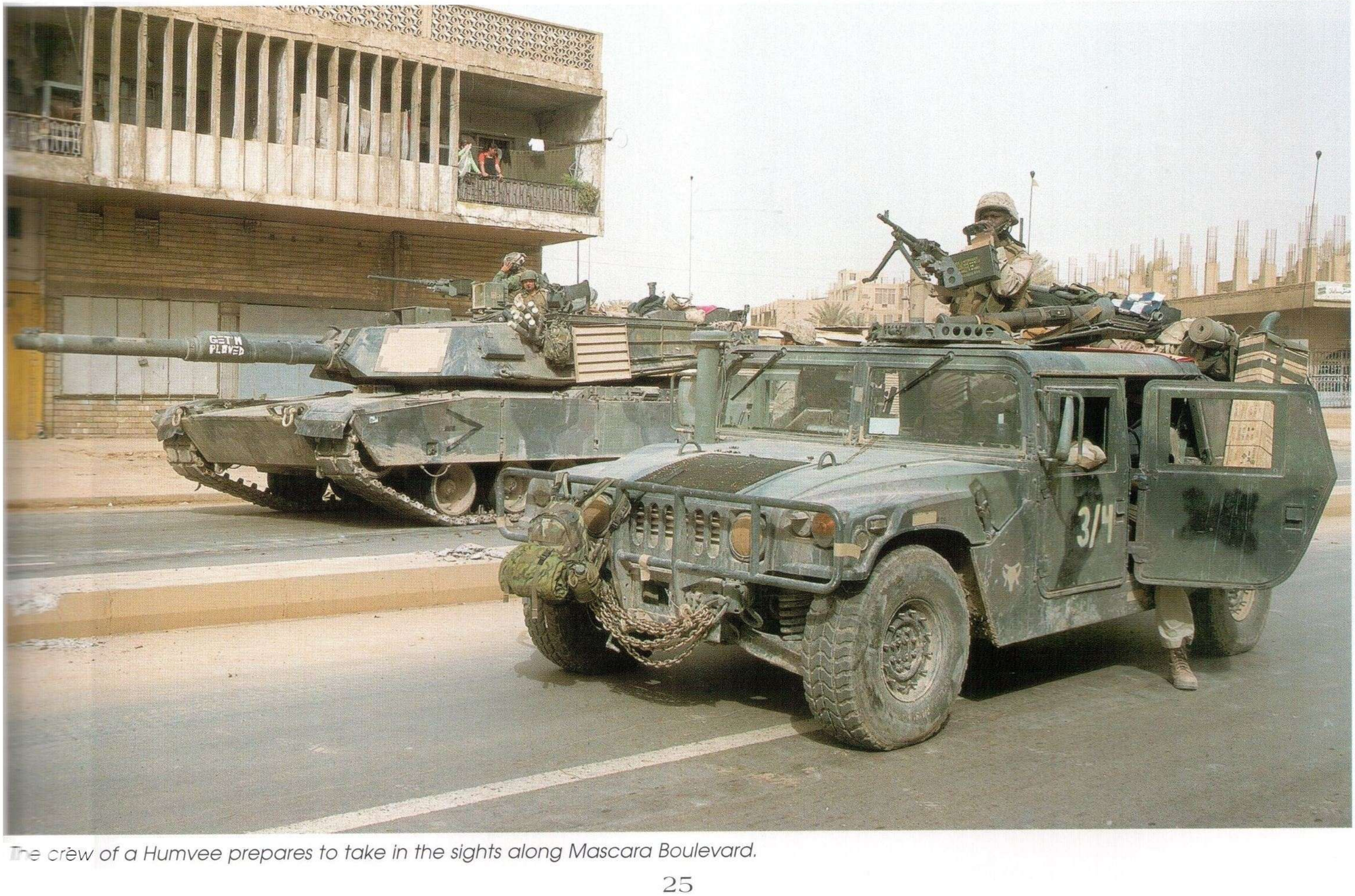
An Amtrac passes in front of the building that houses the Ministry of the Air. The statue, which is very much in the style of the Saddam Hussein regime, honors a pilot who crashed his Mirage into an enemy Phantom during the Iran-Iraq War.

A group of Marines gathers to talk and try to grasp the reality of their arrival in Baghdad.

Few of the Marines were aware that after the Mongol hordes of Kublai Khan, the son of Genghis Khan, and the Janissaries of Soliman the Magnificent, they are only the third military force in history to conquer Baghdad.



The body language of these Marines indicates they are more relaxed than during the advance on Baghdad.



The crew of a Humvee prepares to take in the sights along Mascara Boulevard.

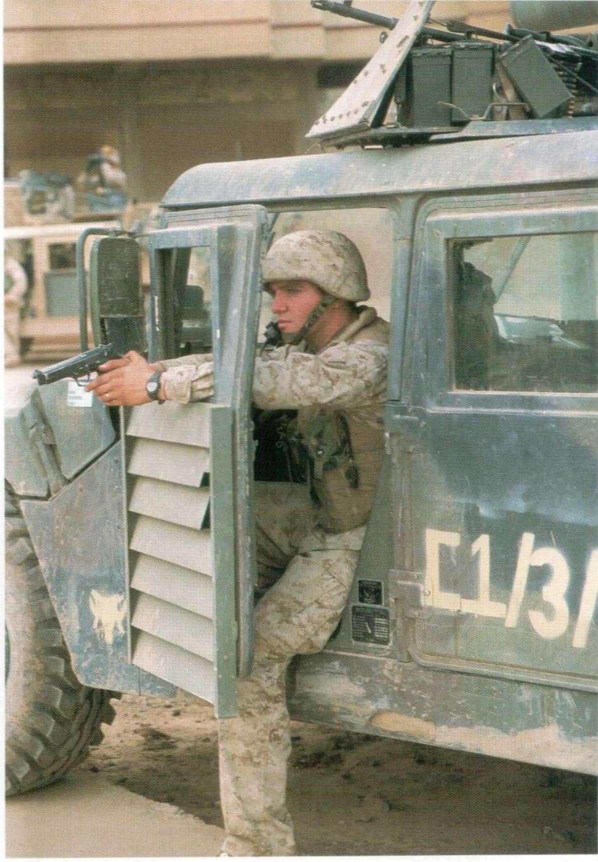
"Leathernecks" of the 3/4 Marines look down a silent Baghdad street that is vacant except for a couple of Amtracs.

These Marines show little hint of anxiety at being in the capital city of the nation against which they are waging war. One even has a smile on his face.

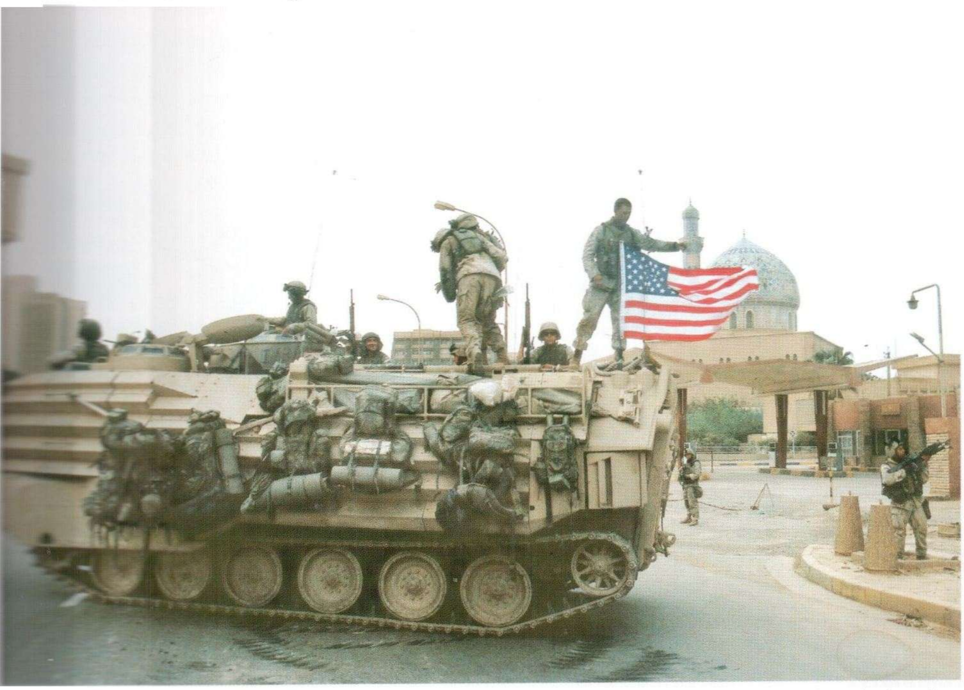
Though the basic attitude of the Marines may have become more relaxed after they entered Baghdad, it does not mean they did not continue to exercise caution, as this Marine demonstrates.

More serious looking than their comrades in the previous photo, these Marines nevertheless seem more observant than uptight.

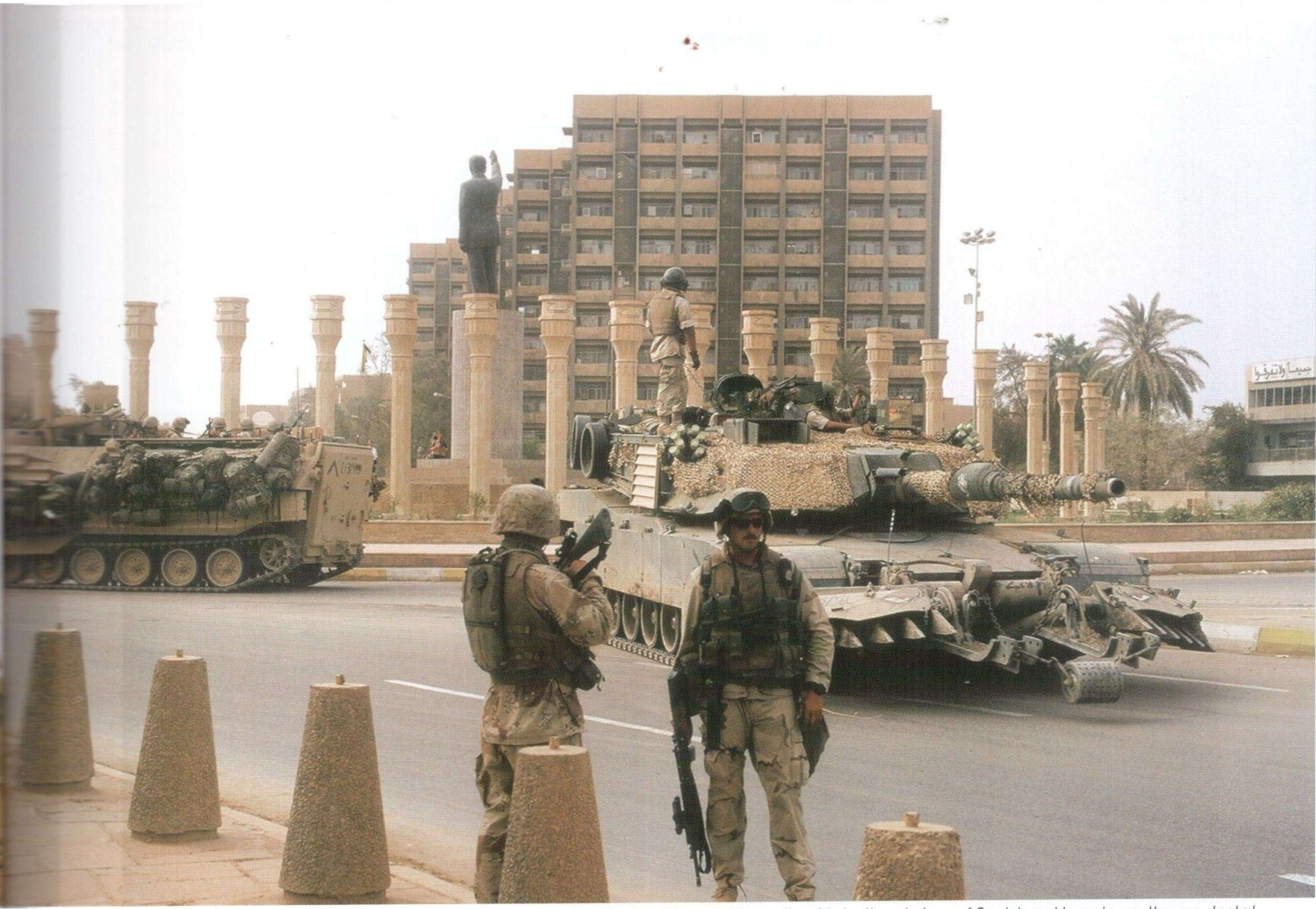
For the entrance into Baghdad, the Marines hoisted the "Stars and Stripes" on their AAV-7A1.



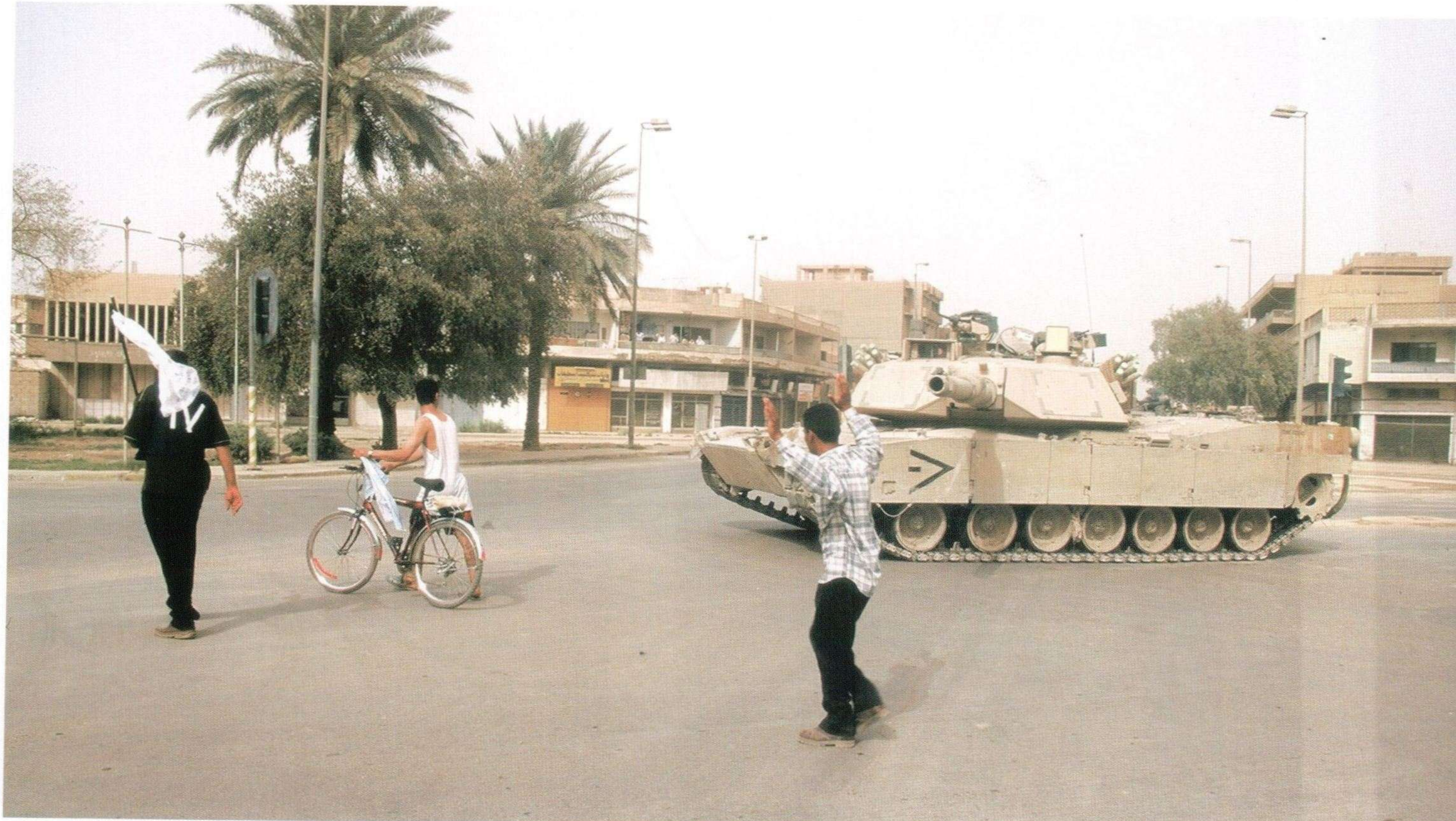
A young Marine dressed in the new desert BDUs of the USMC assures the protection of his Humvee with a regulation 9mm Model 92FS Beretta.



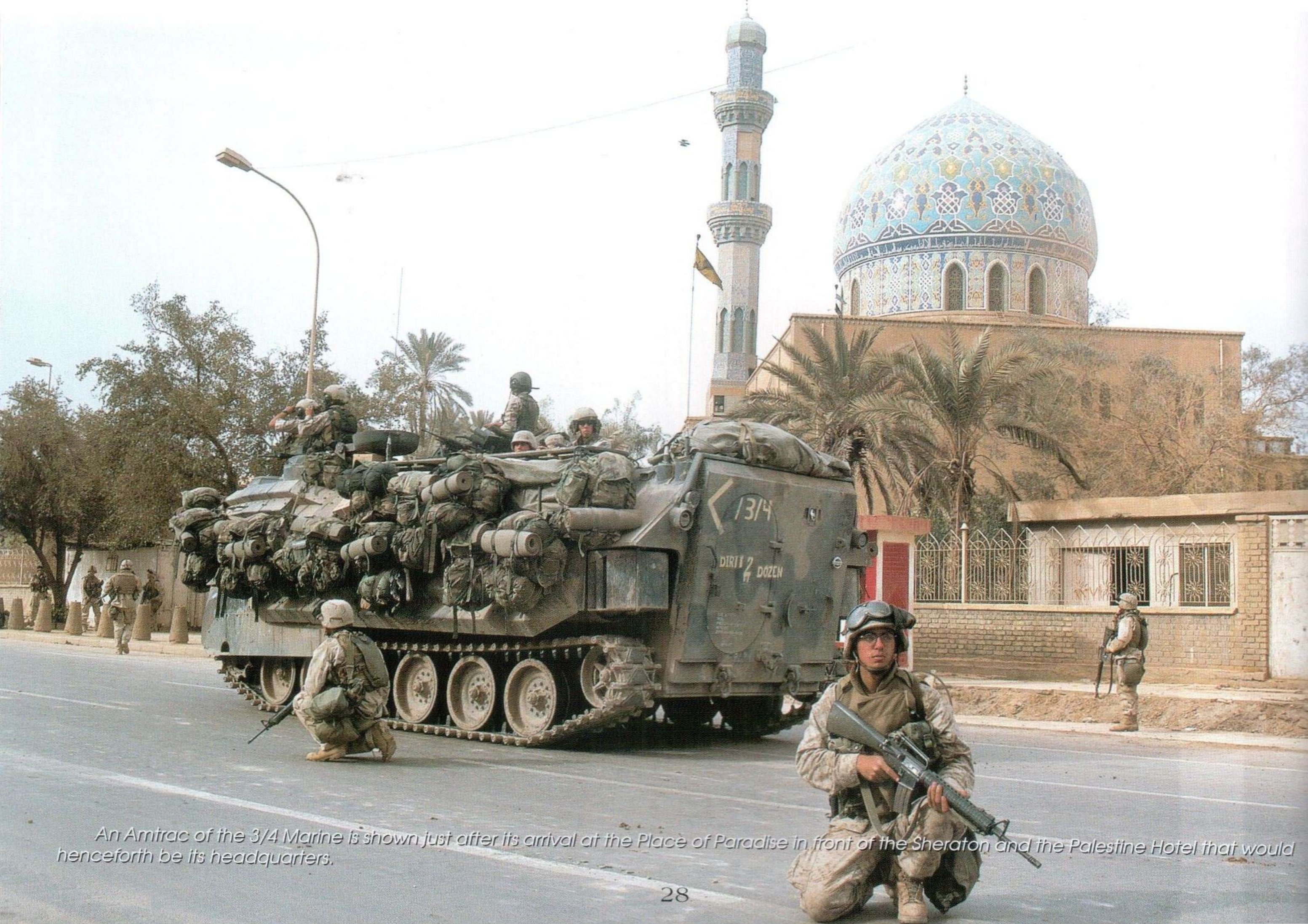
Unlike the earlier Gulf War, the US flag was not often flown on vehicles during the operational phase of "Iraqi Freedom." One reason for this is that the Americans viewed themselves as liberators rather than conquerors.



Marines take a look around to assess the situation after halting in the Place of Paradise. Note the statue of Saddam Hussein on the pedestal in the background.



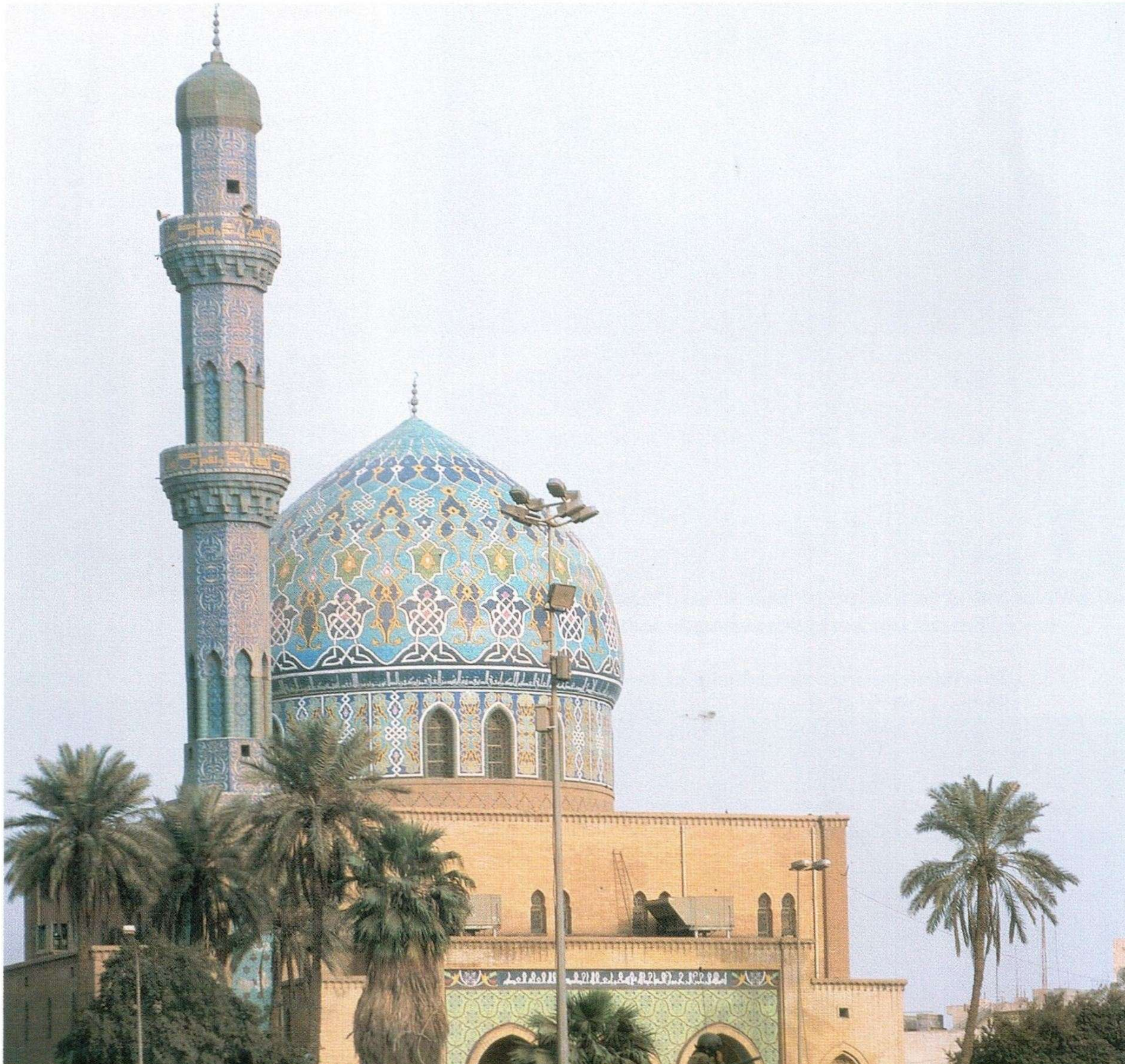
Iraqi civilians, one with his hands raised, warily eye an American M-1A1 Abrams as they are led across a street in the center of Baghdad. For the first time since the end of colonialism, a Western nation, this time the United States, is occupying a major city in the Middle East.



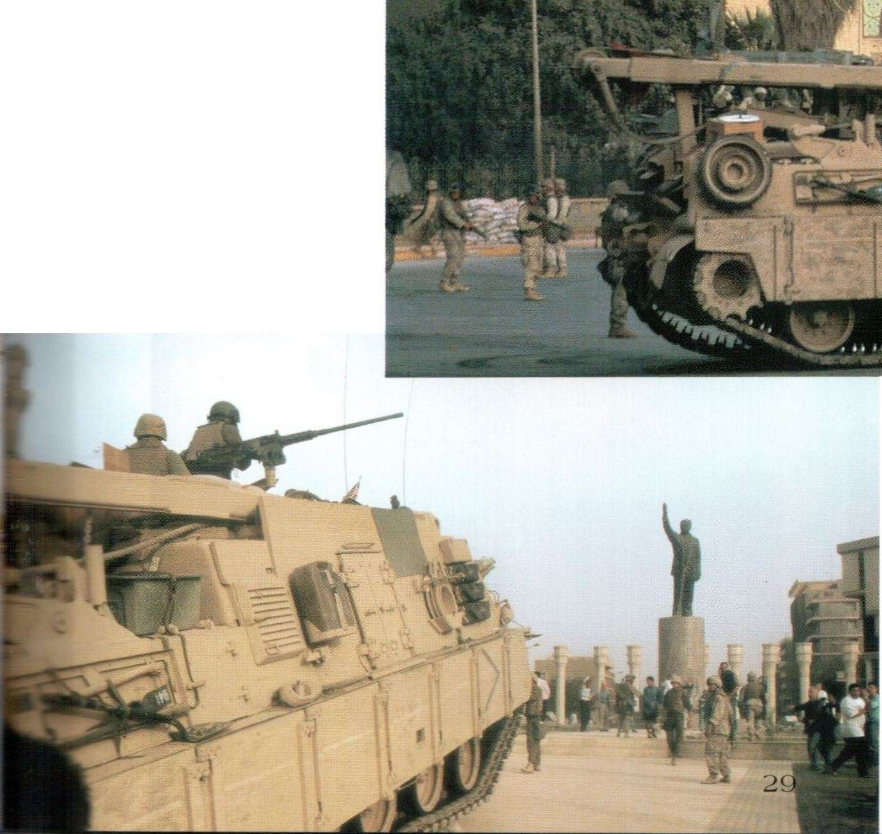
An Amtrac of the 3/4 Marine is shown just after its arrival at the Place of Paradise in front of the Sheraton and the Palestine Hotel that would henceforth be its headquarters.

What Makes History?

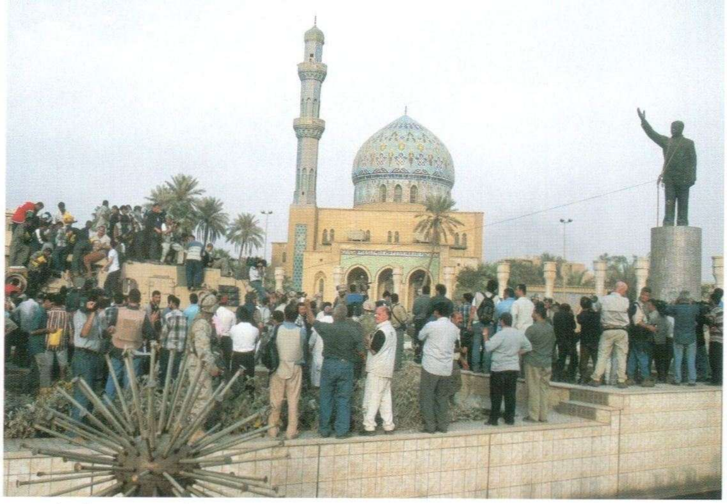
The close-up coverage by the cameras of CNN and FOX TV gave the impression that the toppling of the large statue of Saddam Hussein was a spontaneous demonstration of hostility to the regime and a welcoming of the American troops. The author contends that his photos show just the opposite.



The M-88A2 would shortly help to make history, as well as some good news footage.



At about 1715, an M-88A2 Hercules approached the huge statue of Saddam Hussein where a crowd of about 30 people had gathered around the now famous statue.



In the crowd that gathered at the oversized statue of Hussein, there were almost as many journalists as there were Iraqis.

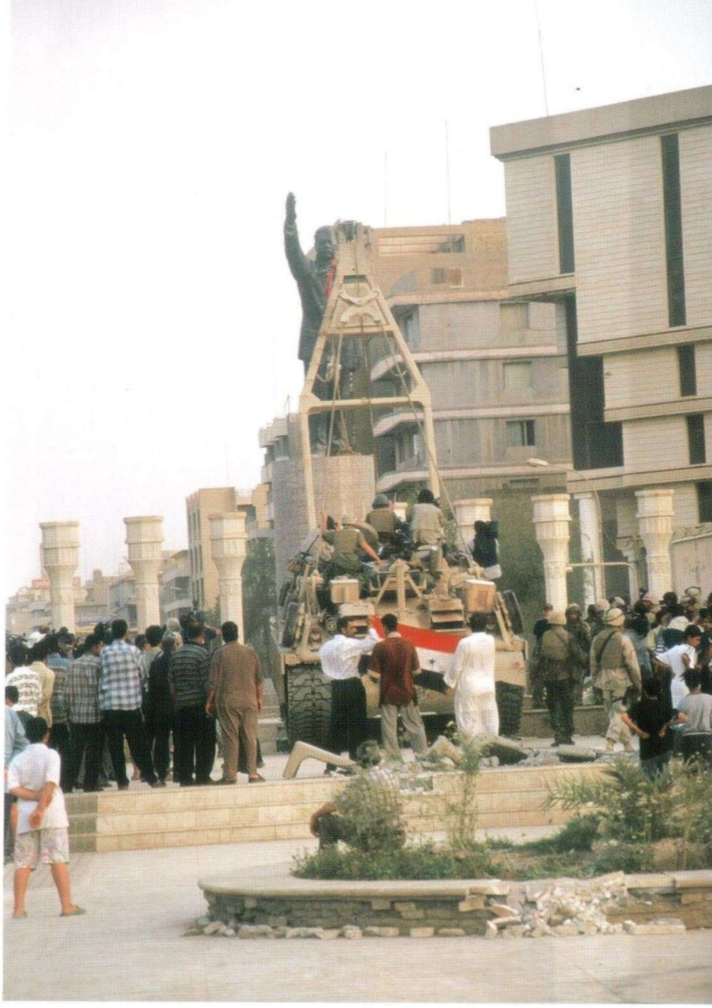
To establish an impartial judgment of the state of mind of the average resident of Baghdad at the arrival of the American troops, one should note that:

1. The wait-and-see population was mainly happy with the end of combat and the bombardment;

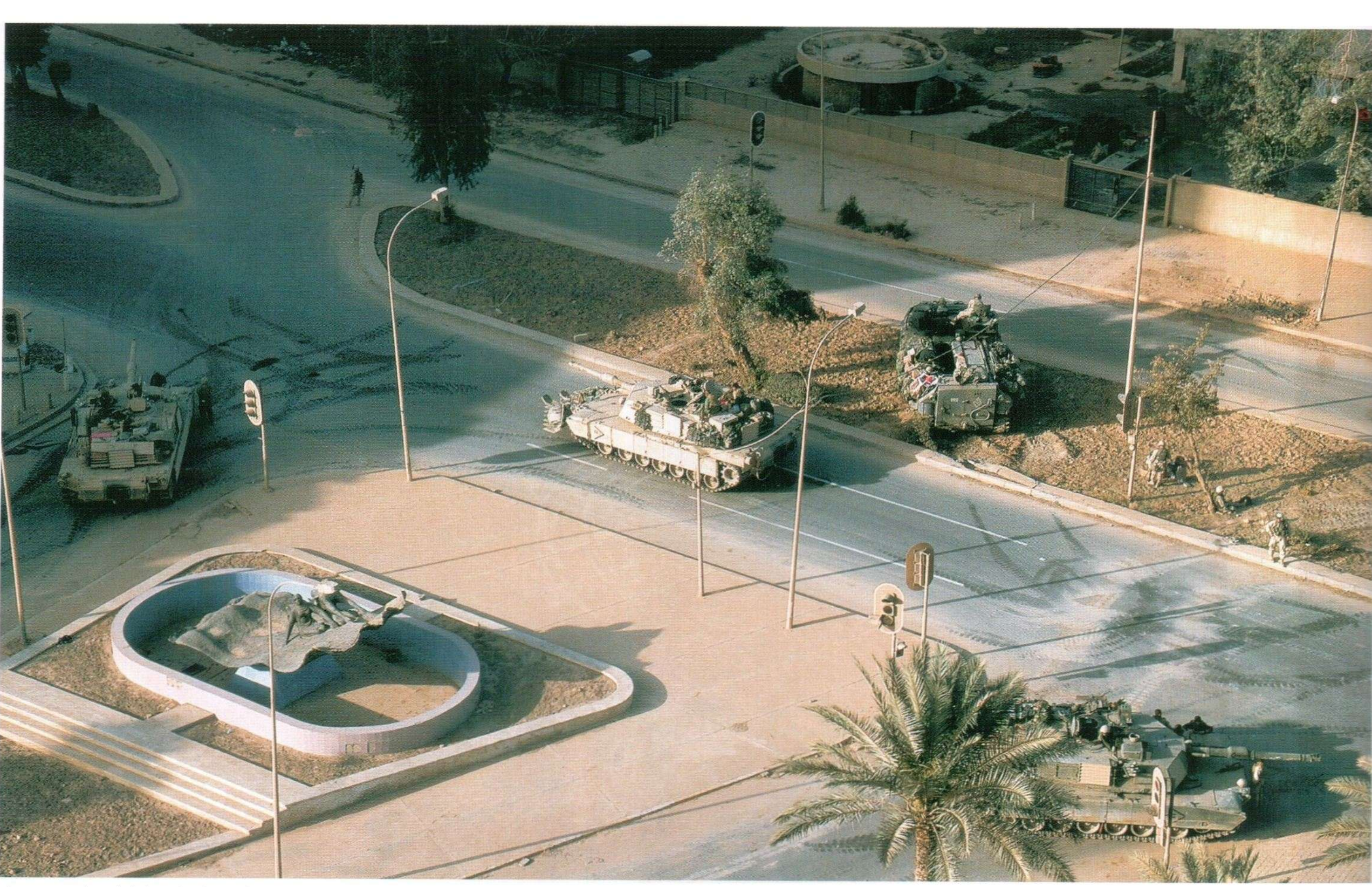
2. ome of the residents of Baghdad were happy to see the dictatorship of Saddam laid low by American intervention;

3. The Americans were cheered only in Saddam City and in the poor Shi'ite districts of Baghdad. The jubilation may not last if the religious leaders quickly restore power over the population;

4. Many among the Baghdad middle class assert that Saddam is the real head of the government and that the American invasion was only an excuse to take from the Iraqis their oil wealth.



At 1745, the crowd of Iraqis, with the assistance of the America troops and their M-88A2, tore down the statue of Saddam Hussein.



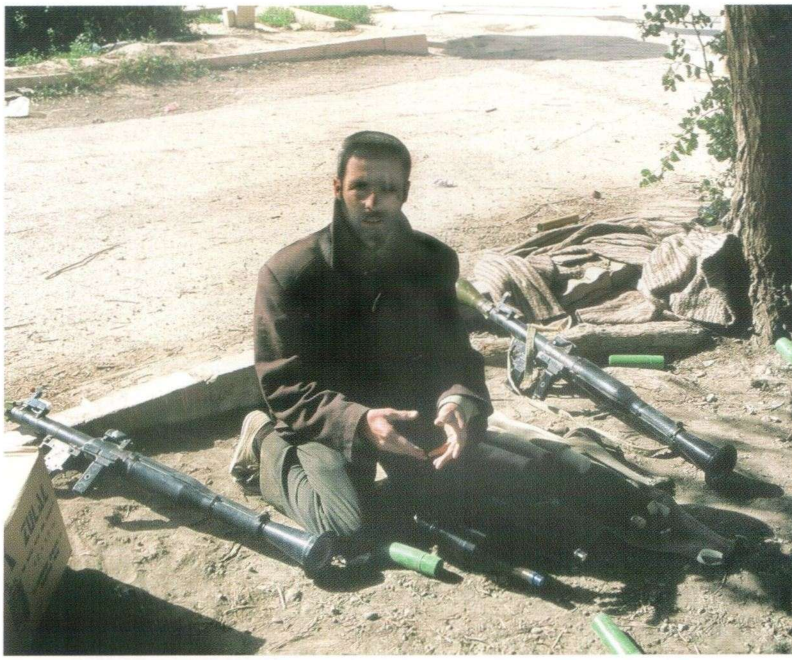
Armored vehicles belonging to the US Marines sit outside the Palestine Hotel. It is 9 April, and Baghdad has fallen.

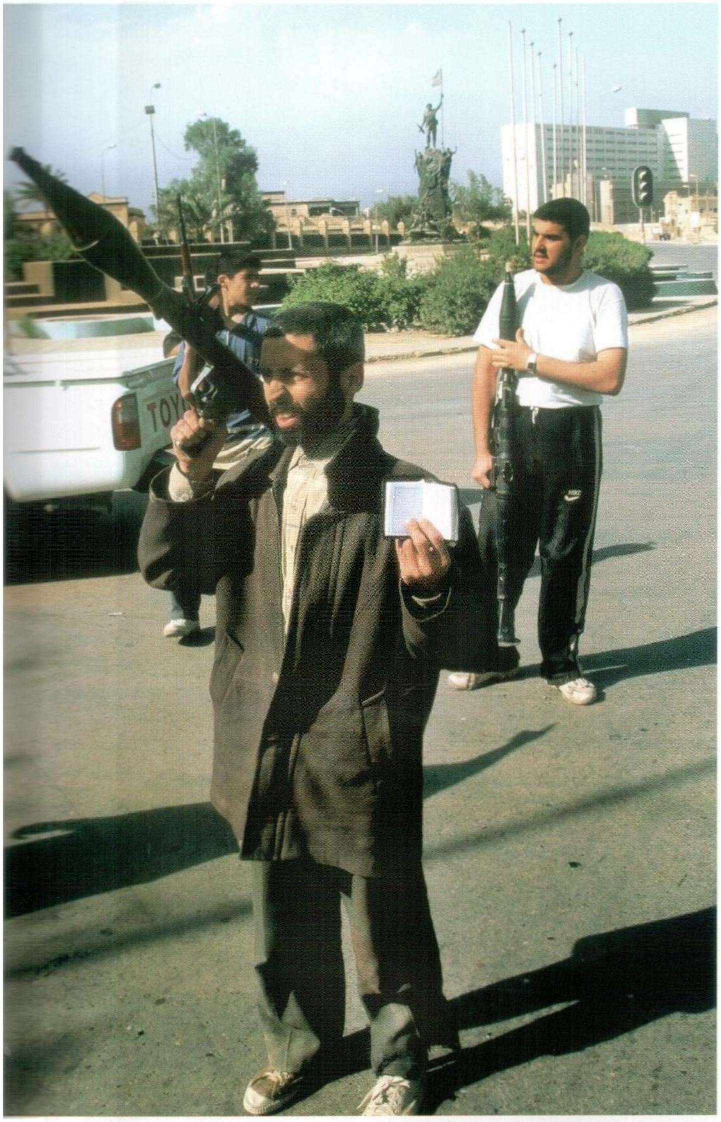
The Last Defenders

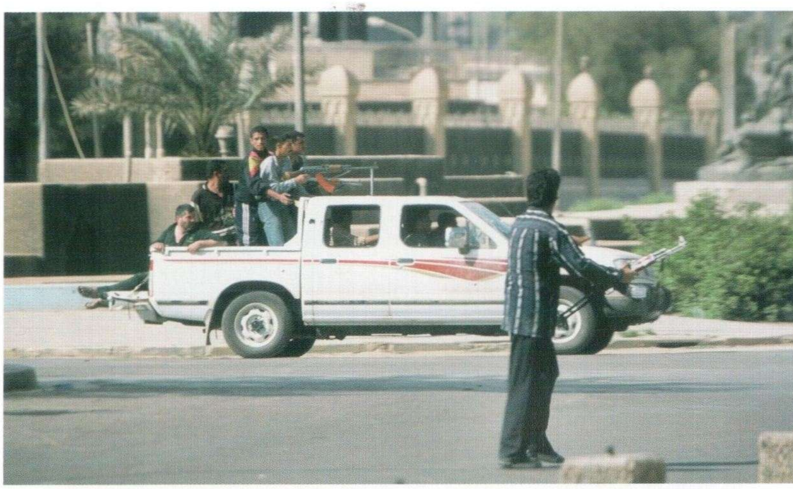
Following the 3rd Infantry Division's occupation of Saddam's palaces on the bend of the Tigris River and the Marine occupation of the Place of July 14, combat renewed for three days. Baghdad's last defenders were stubborn and courageous. Some Fedayeen (Saddam loyalists) let the author photograph them in front of a bridge. They are civilians, and not especially young. Among them were a Syrian and two Sudanese. The rest were locals. One of them displayed an RPG-7 and the Koran. Nobody thought to use the BMP-2 abandoned nearby by the Iraqi Army.

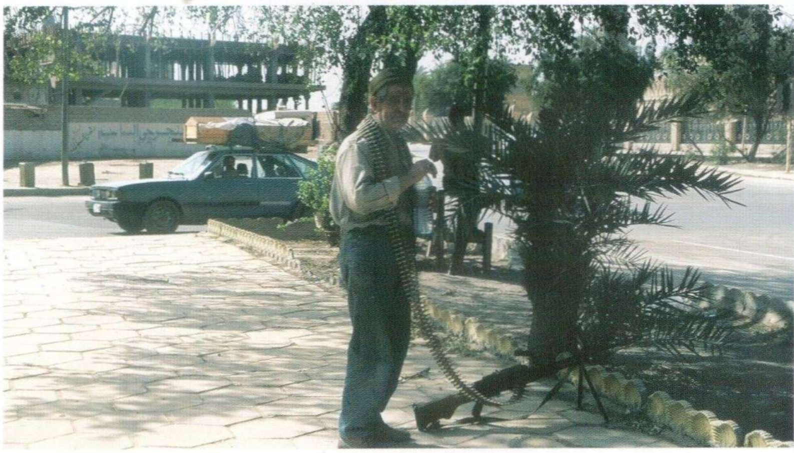
Farther away, in the northwest district of Adamia, some Fedayeen were holding out. They even damaged an M-1A1 that was trying to cross a bridge and an A-10A, which crashed near the airport. The Americans retaliated harshly. An F/A-18 did not hesitate to use 250kg bombs in the streets. Apaches and Cobra strafed the streets, as well. Hellfire missiles (some say a shell from an M-1A1 tank) pulverized the minaret of one of the oldest mosques in Baghdad.

In an old narrow street, some foreign Fedayeen from Syria, Yemen and the Sudan sat on the pavement to rest. The local residents provided these defenders with . . . a chocolate cake. With eyes sad with fatigue, these people looked like they have already died. It's a pity they would not allow their photographs to be taken.


The last defenders of Baghdad are courageous, but poorly armed.


The Koran and an RPG, an image that may become more and more common in the post-Saddam era. The Fedayeen fighter wearing the white shirt at the back came from Damascus to fight for the Arabic cause.


Some of the Fedayeen ride in the bed of a pick-up truck. Saddam Hussein bought all the pick-ups with the red and orange arrows on the side to equip his loyal paramilitary troops.


An old man serves a PKM light machine gun. Note the car in the background carrying a coffin on its roof.

Though the Fedayeen are not very military in their appearance, their PRG-7s and Kalashnikovs are as deadly as those carried by the most regulation of soldiers. Saddam's loyal Fedayeen come in a variety of ages. They also come from various countries, answering the Iraqi government's plea to join the jihad (holy war) against the coalition troops.

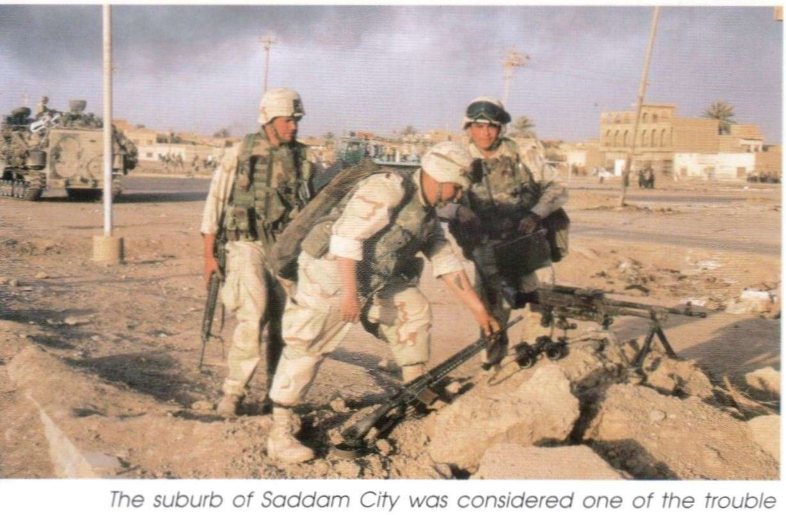
اتحاد الصناعات العراقي

Iraqi citizens engage in looting under the watchful eye of a Saddam Hussein poster. By this point in the conflict, Saddam no longer had any control over his people. The Americans chose not to intervene to prevent the looting.

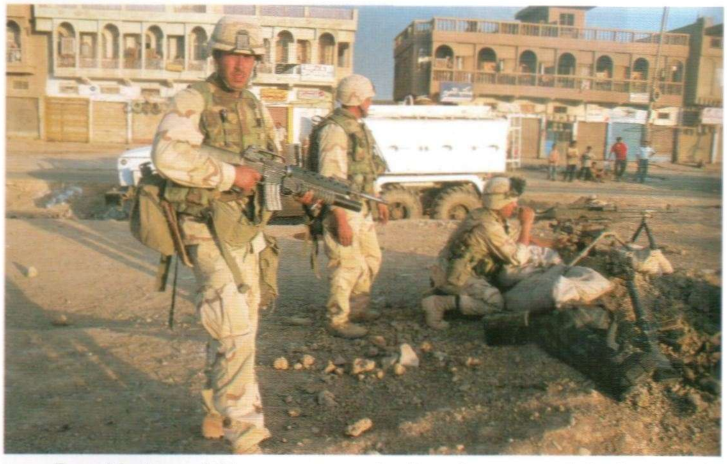
Trophies

Marines set up a checkpoint in Saddam City, Baghdad's northern suburb.

The Marines of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force, after having fought from Al Zubayr to Baghdad, would now occupy the capital city of Baghdad. Nevertheless, a part of the 1st MEF was sent to Tikrit to seize Saddam's hometown, which would wrap up the USMC's campaign in Iraq. Henceforth, the military phase would give way to the occupying phase. One of the first tasks for the Marines was to take inventory of the captured *matériel*. The "leathernecks" would also need to ensure their protection by establishing numerous mobile control points in Baghdad's northern suburb.



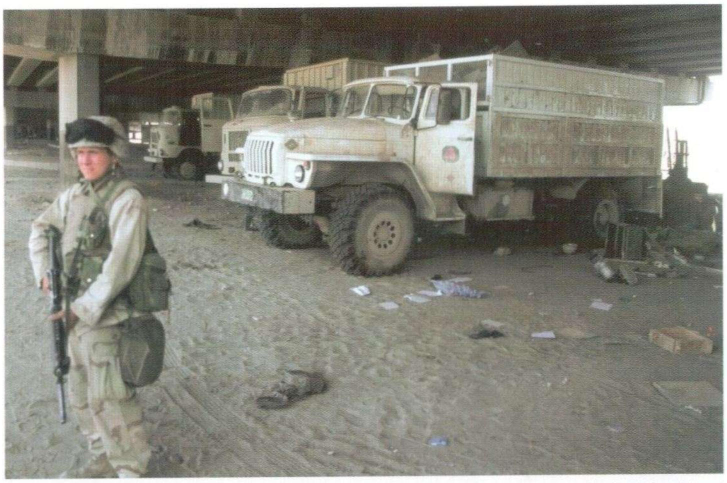
The suburb of Saddam City was considered one of the trouble spots within the capital.



The Marine striking a pose in the foreground is typical in appearance of the men who were tasked with the challenge of occupying Baghdad.

The establishment of control points enabled the Marines to control the stream of weapons in and out of the city and to possibly arrest leaders of the Baath Party.

The Marines discovered a trove of vehicles and equipment that the Iraqis had left under the beltway that skirts the northern part of the city of Baghdad. Among them was a 14.5mm machine gun, which a Marine hauls away in this photograph.



A young Marine stands guard in front of several trucks left behind when the Iraqi forces quickly fled the area.

A half dozen Marines take a break from taking inventory of captured Iraqi matériel to pose for a photo. One of them proudly exhibits the 14.5mm machine gun seen above.

Partially concealed in makeshift foxholes dug at the base of a cement girder, Marines keep watch over their comrades under the highway that rings the city of Baghdad.

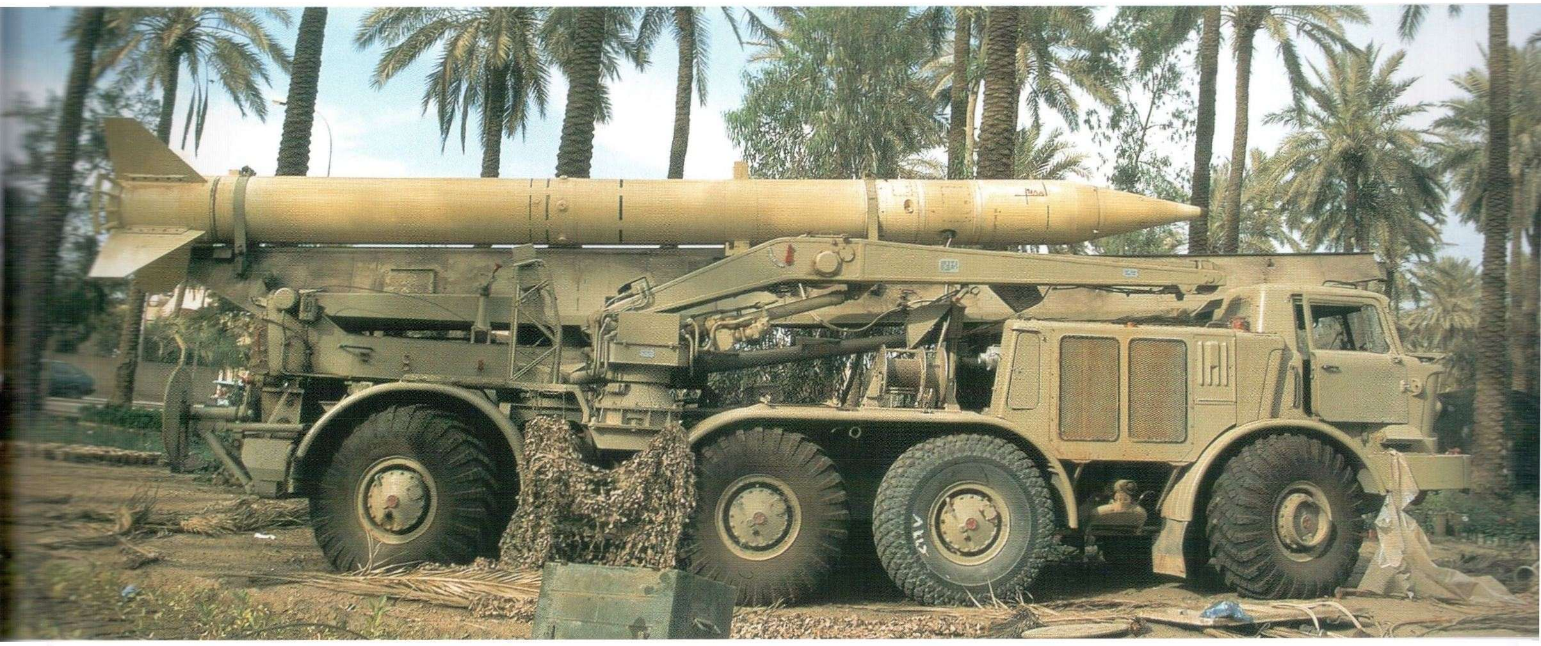
Residents of Baghdad eye their occupiers with curiosity as a Humvee TOW rumbles down the road.

It was troops of the Hamurabi Division of the Republican Guard left behind the matériel that was discovered under the beltway.

With the exception of the poorer Shi'ites in the northern suburbs, the population of Baghdad gave the US forces a lukewarm welcome.

The grace period given to the US forces was destined to be short lived. As the weeks passed, more American soldiers would lose their lives to terrorist attacks.

A FROG-7 Hidden in the Nursery



The Marines finally discovered the FROG-7 on 12 April. The removal of the camouflage netting affords a good view of the ZIL-135 truck that transports the rocket.

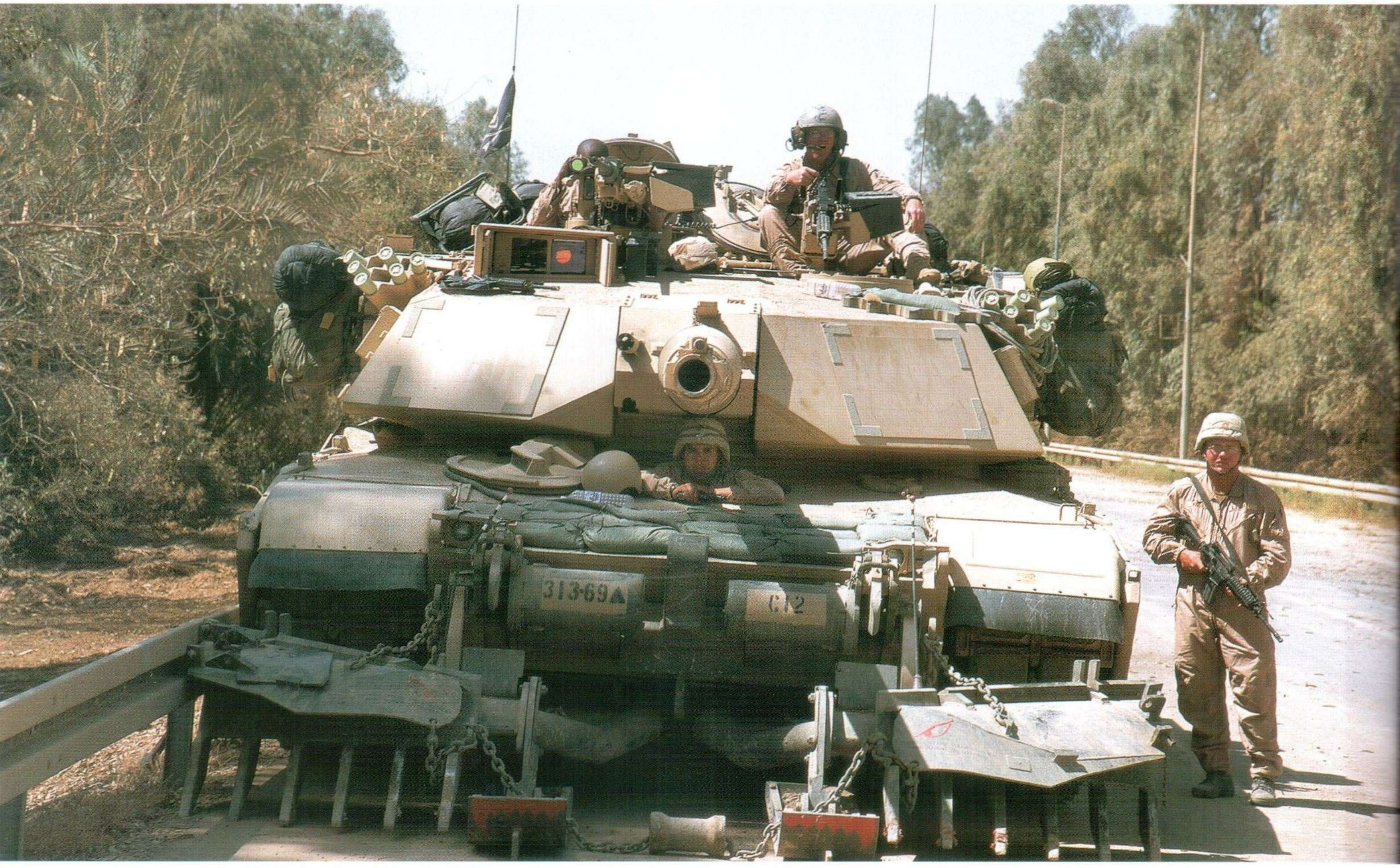
A walk through Baghdad's northern suburbs can reveal many surprises. Two FROG-7 launchers were abandoned in a plant nursery there. An outdated system, the FROG (Free Rocket Over Ground) has a war load of 55kg for a maximum range of 70 kilometers with a margin of error of 450 in 700 meters. This large rocket would have caused a lot of damage in the 3rd Infantry Division if it were launched at the airport. During the 1991 Gulf War, FROG-7s fired at Kuwait killed 32 Senegalese soldiers.

A FROG-7 covered with a camouflage net was photographed in a plant nursery in the northern district of Baghdad on 11 April.

Apparently, the US aircraft did not spot the FROG-7 rocket. The destruction of the weapon would have eliminated any threat of its use against American forces, but the explosion of the war load would have destroyed the district.

The Iraqis no doubt followed the Warsaw Pact practice of combining a battalion of FROG-7s with a command battery and two firing batteries, each with two launchers. Each firing battery is equipped with two support trucks that can carry six missiles.

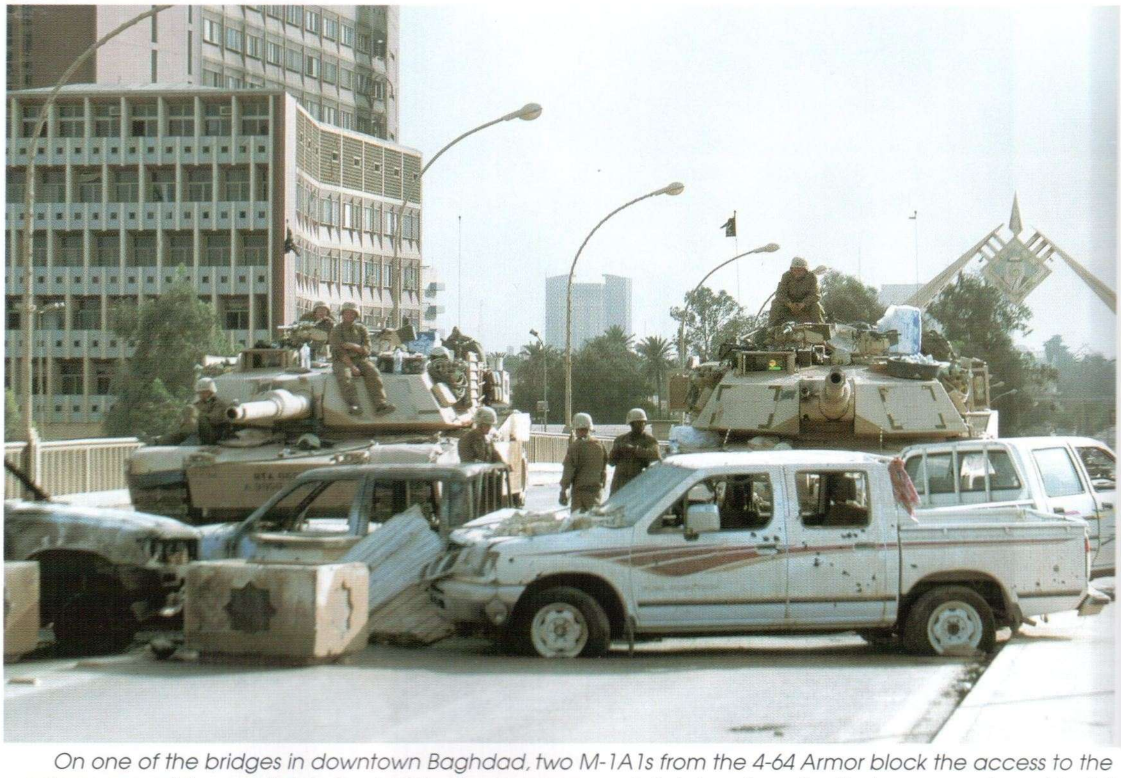
Guarding the Airport



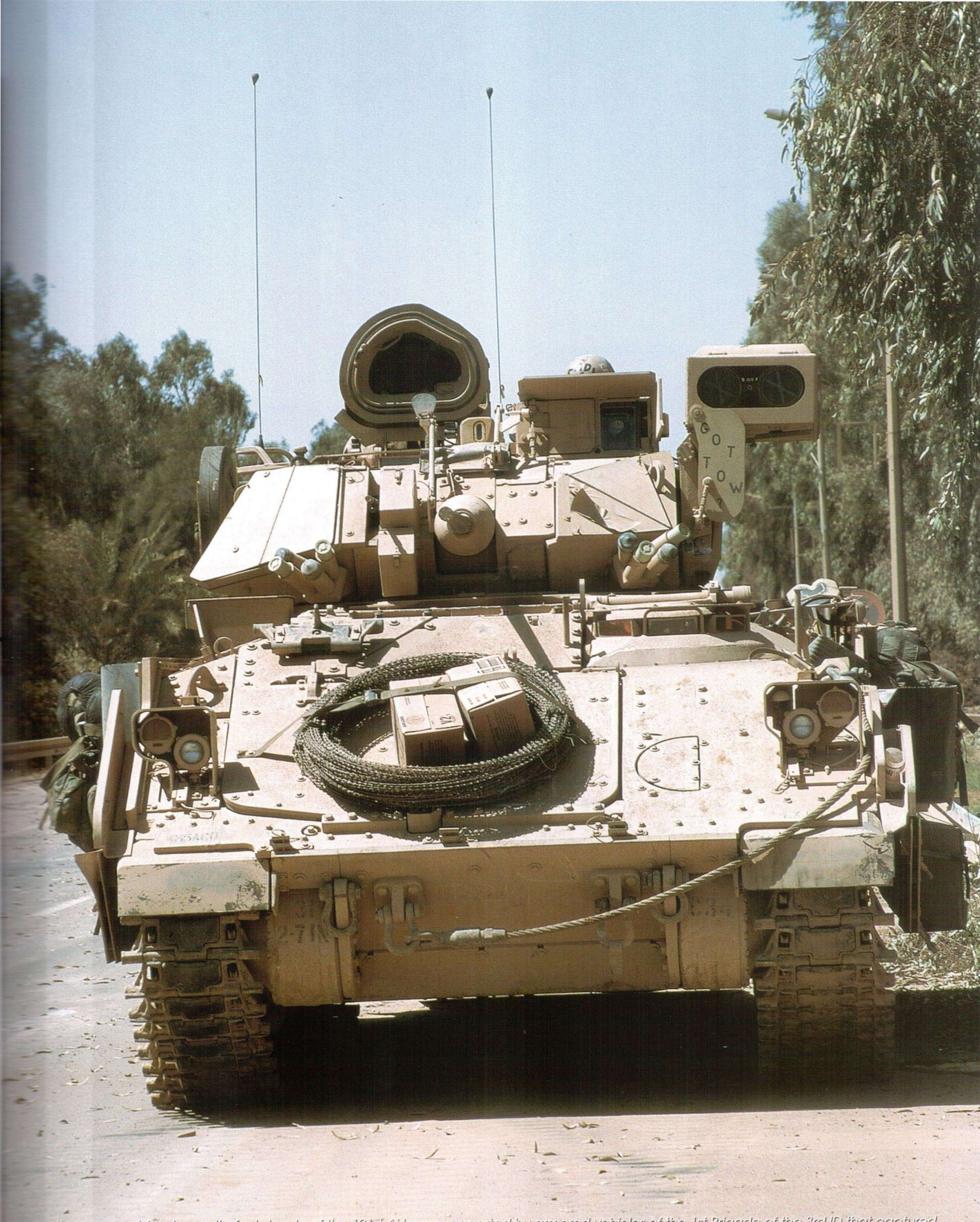
Armor from the 1st Brigade of the 3rd ID man the roadblock on the road to the airport. This M-1A1 Abrams belonging to the 3-69 Armor is shown at a checkpoint in the western section of Baghdad.

While the Marines occupy the center of Baghdad and the districts on the left bank of the Tigris, the 3rd Infantry Division is reorganized. The 2nd Brigade remains stationed near the palaces of Saddam Hussein, while the two other brigades make a virtual fortress of the airport, which is vital to the coalition. Some of the support units, like the artillery, the MLRS and the Patriot batteries, use the circular boulevard in Baghdad to settle down there.

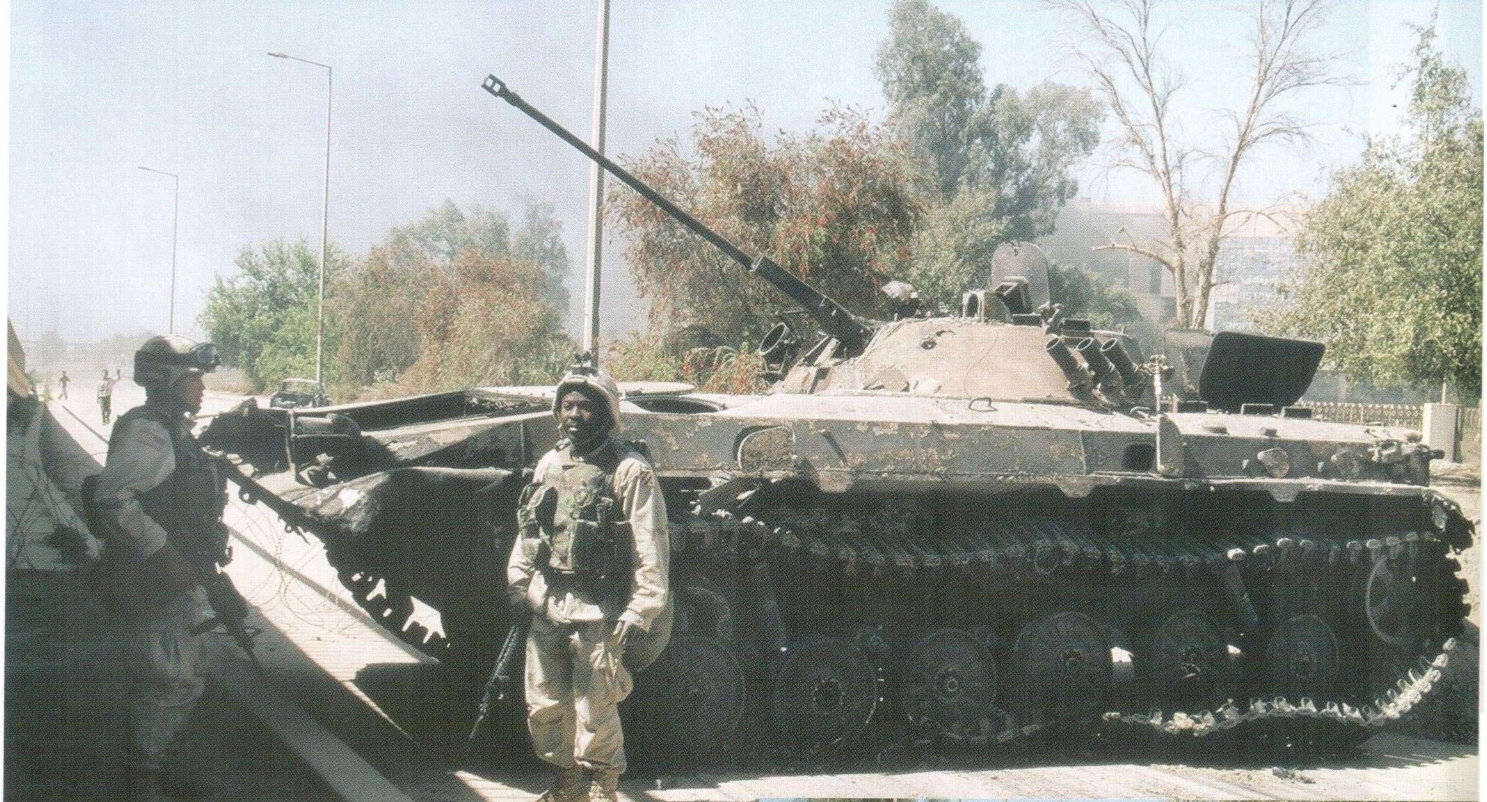
Getting to the airport is like going through an obstacle course since it is practically a "no-entry" zone. The western section of Baghdad is controlled with the help of checkpoints, which are generally located at the large intersections and are made up of three Bradleys and two M-1A1s. The GIs do not hesitate to fire warning shots inches from the tires of the press vehicles coming to inquire about the situation.



On one of the bridges in downtown Baghdad, two M-1A1s from the 4-64 Armor block the access to the western zone of the capital. In front of the tanks are some 4x4s taken from the Fedayeen and used to foil any kamikaze-like attacks. From the nearby bridge, some M-1A1s of the same unit fired on the Palestine Hotel, killing two journalists and wounding two others.

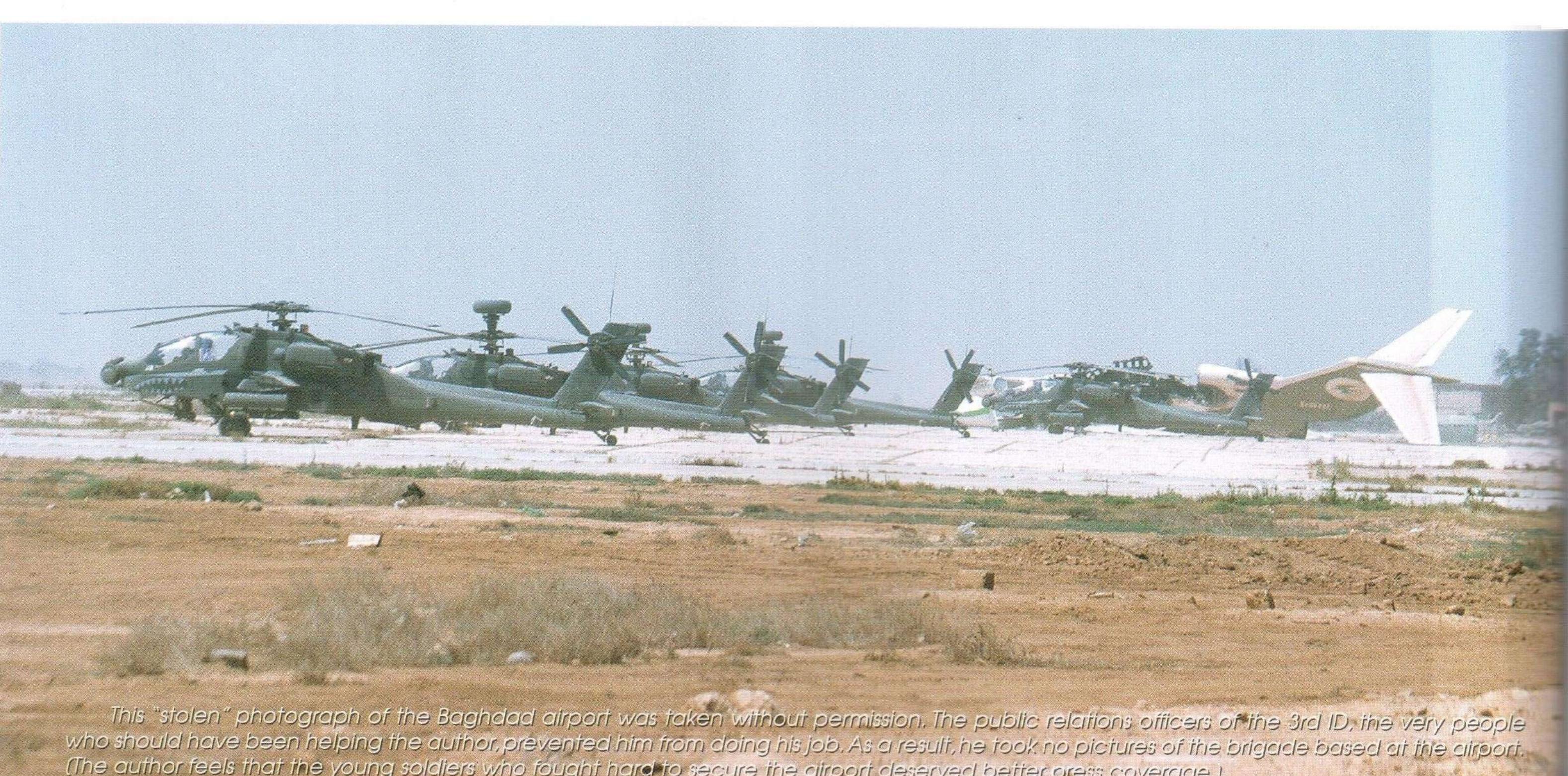


It was a combined assault of a brigade of the 101st Airborne supported by armored vehicles of the 1st Brigade of the 3rd ID that captured the main terminal of the airport. According to its crew, this Bradley IFV of the 2-7 Infantry was the first Bradley to enter the airport.

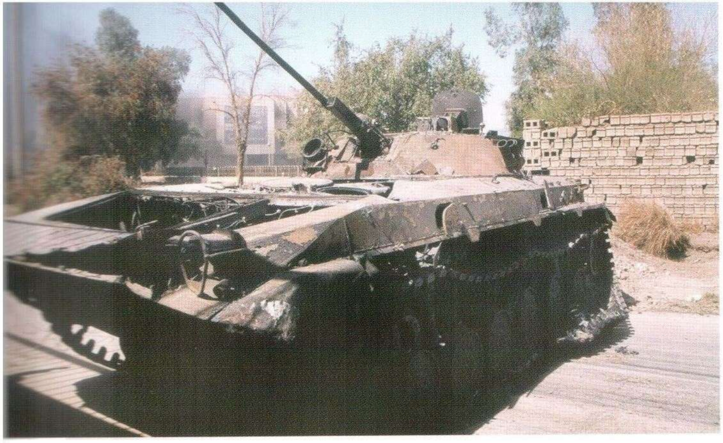


Together with a similar vehicle, this BMP-2 was destroyed at one of the crossroads of Baghdad's western beltway. On the technical side, the BMP-2 has no reason to envy the Bradley. It has a better silhouette, excellent mobility, amphibious capacity, and an excellent automatic 30mm that is a good match for the M-2/M-3's 25mm Chain Gun.

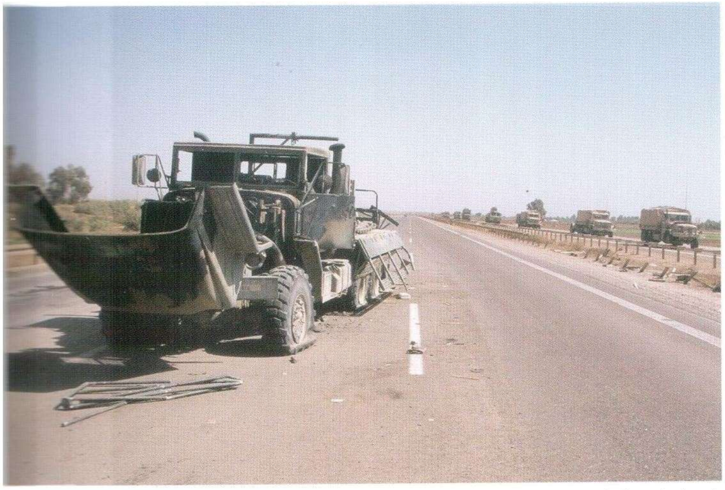
Two GIs from the 2-7 Infantry keep a sharp vigil at the checkpoint on the road to the airport.



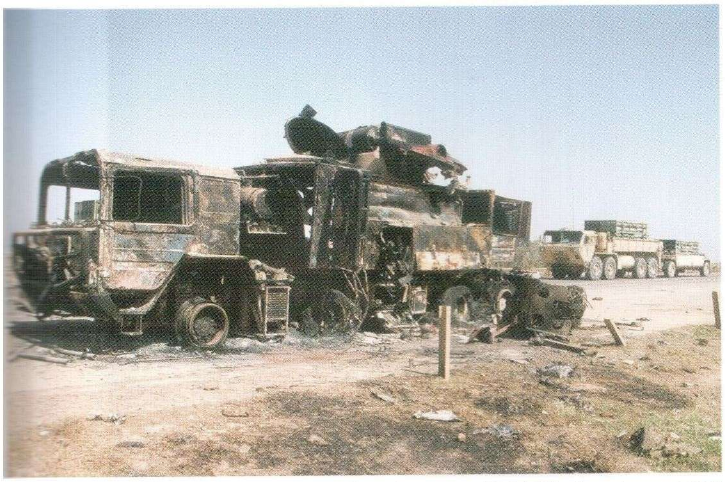
This "stolen" photograph of the Baghdad airport was taken without permission. The public relations officers of the 3rd ID, the very people who should have been helping the author, prevented him from doing his job. As a result, he took no pictures of the brigade based at the airport. (The author feels that the young soldiers who fought hard to secure the airport deserved better press coverage.)



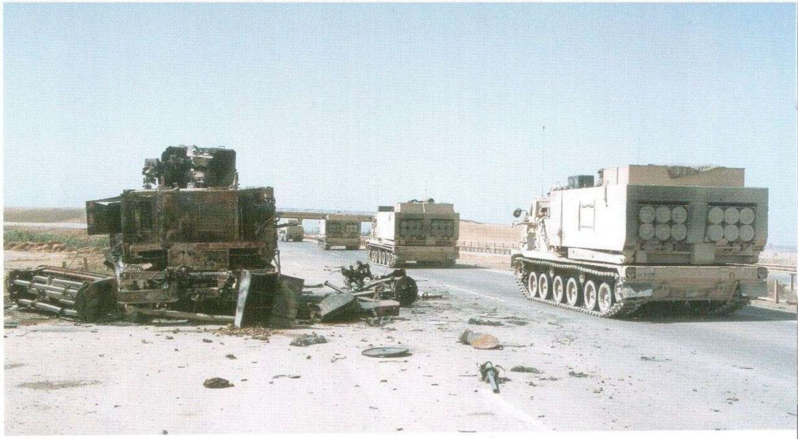
Unfortunately for the Iraqis, they seemed to be riveted to the ground and incapable of taking advantage of the quality of some of their equipment, as this BMP-2 attests.



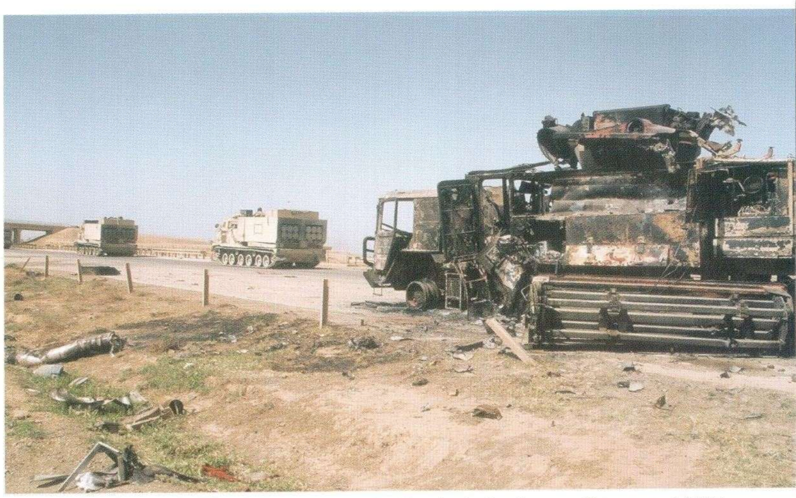
An American truck destroyed on the beltway around Baghdad. The flat tires and the presence of an RPG-7 warhead in the wreck indicate that the truck was doubtless a victim of an ambush. Organized Iraqi resistance could make it difficult to supply the US troops. Convoys, such as the one seen in the background, would be particularly vulnerable to guerilla attacks.



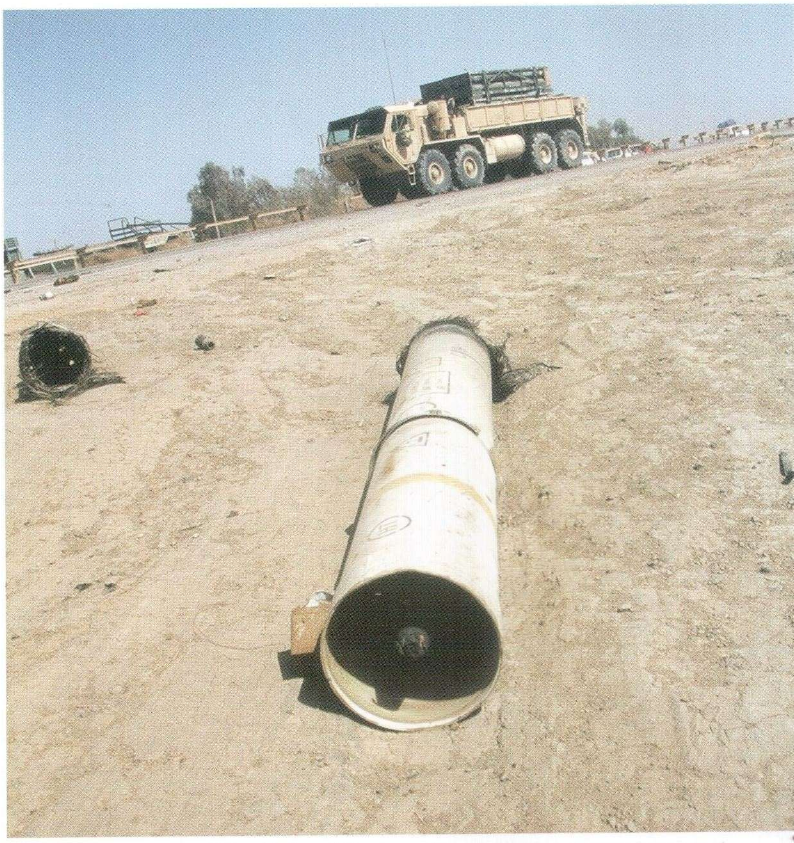
Iraq received twelve Roland 2 systems on AMX-30 chassis and 100 on shelters on MAN tractors. America accused France of sending Roland 3s to Iraq, but the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs denied this.



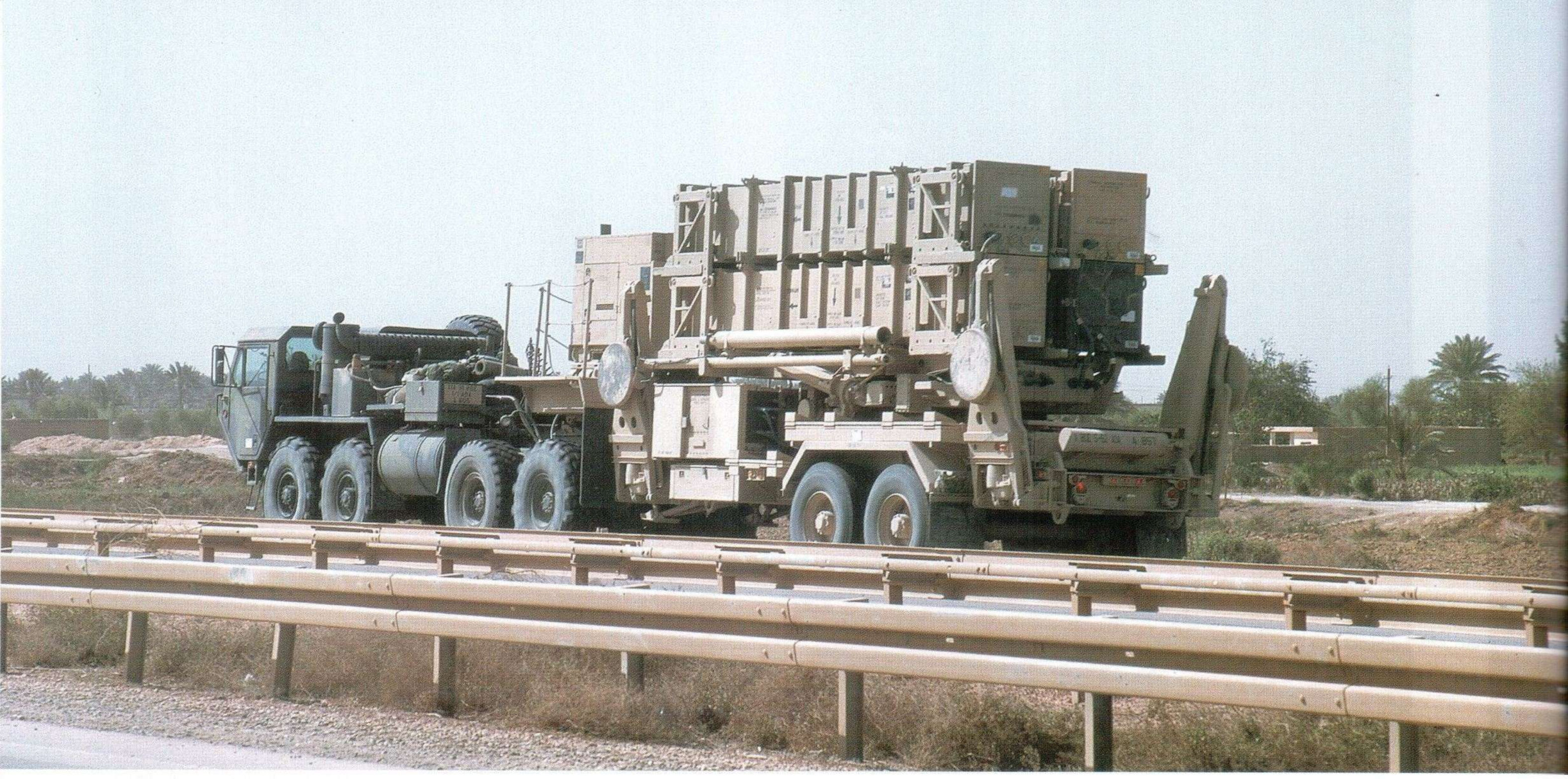
This photo is particularly interesting because it shows the charred remains of a rare Western vehicle used by the Iraqi Army, a French Roland 2.



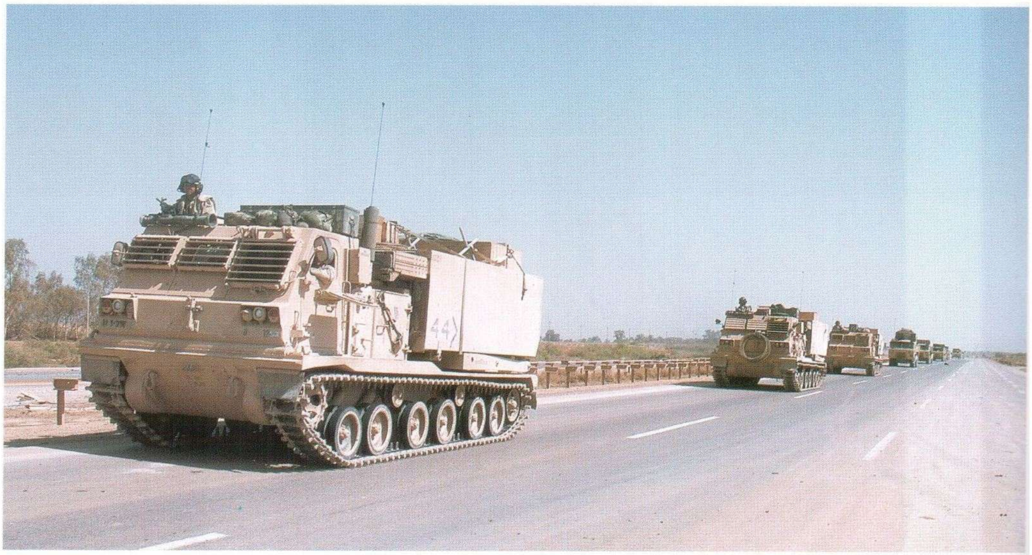
The Roland 2 is mounted on a shelter installed on a German MAN truck.



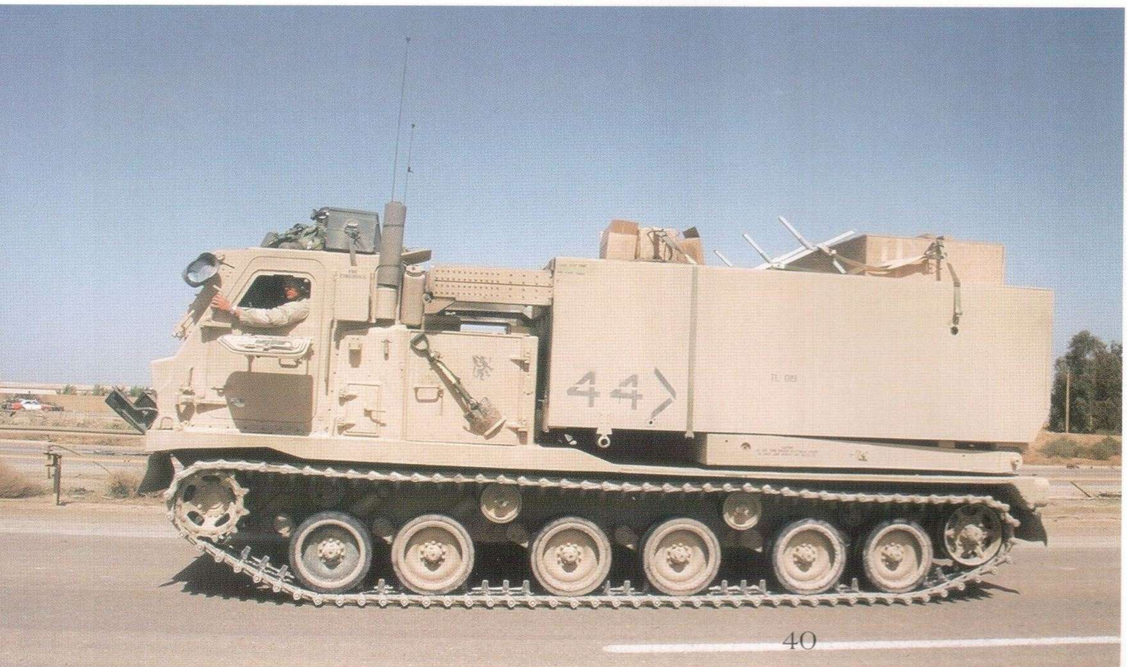
Various parts of the Roland 2 were strewn on the ground around the vehicle. The Roland 3 distinguishes itself from the 2 version only by its computer.



A Patriot battery of the V Corps was also part of the convoy heading to the airport.

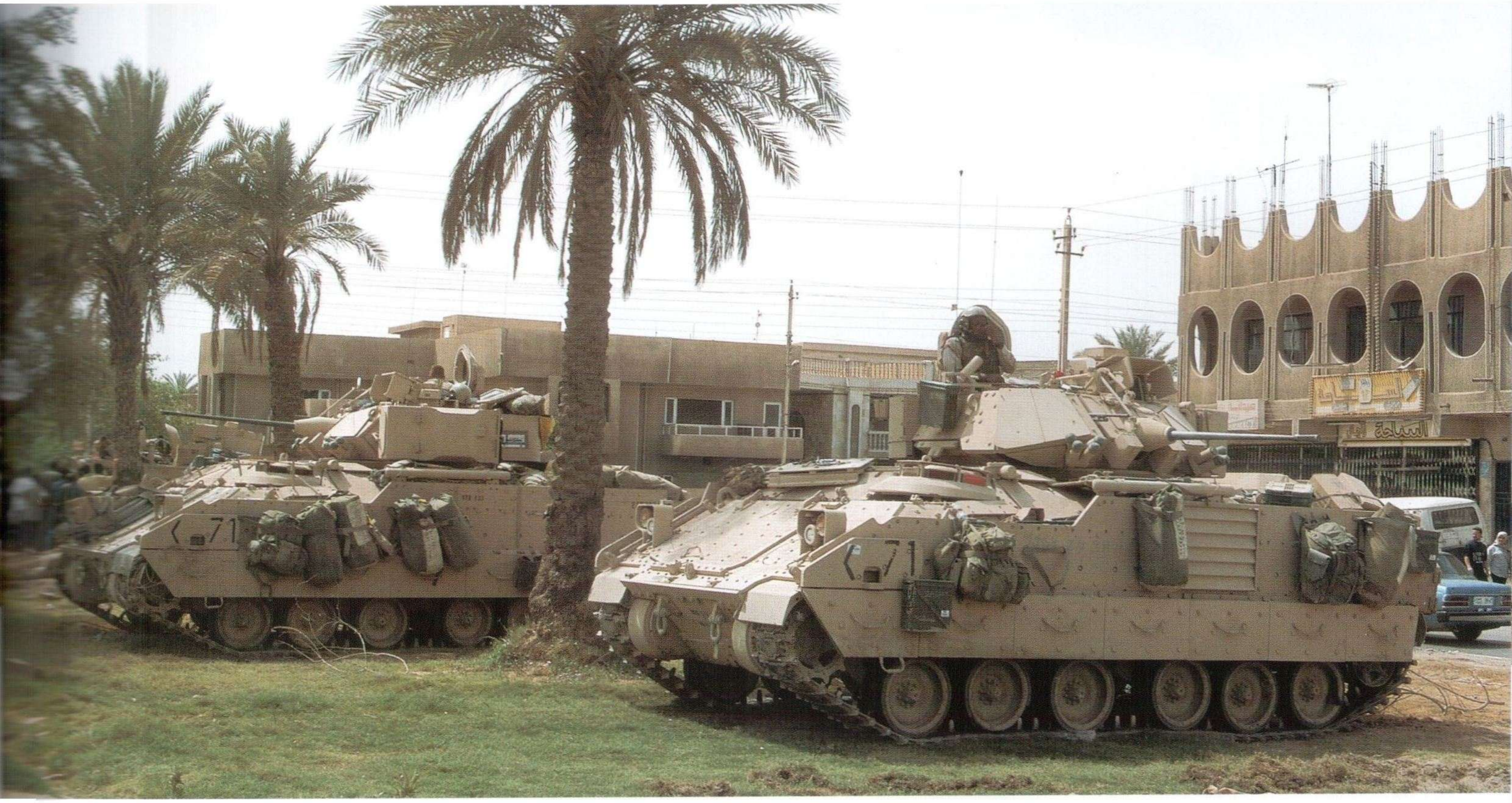


A column of Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS) head toward the airport during the reorganization of the "Marne Division" on 11 April.



The MLRS belonged to the 1-39 Field Artillery Regiment.

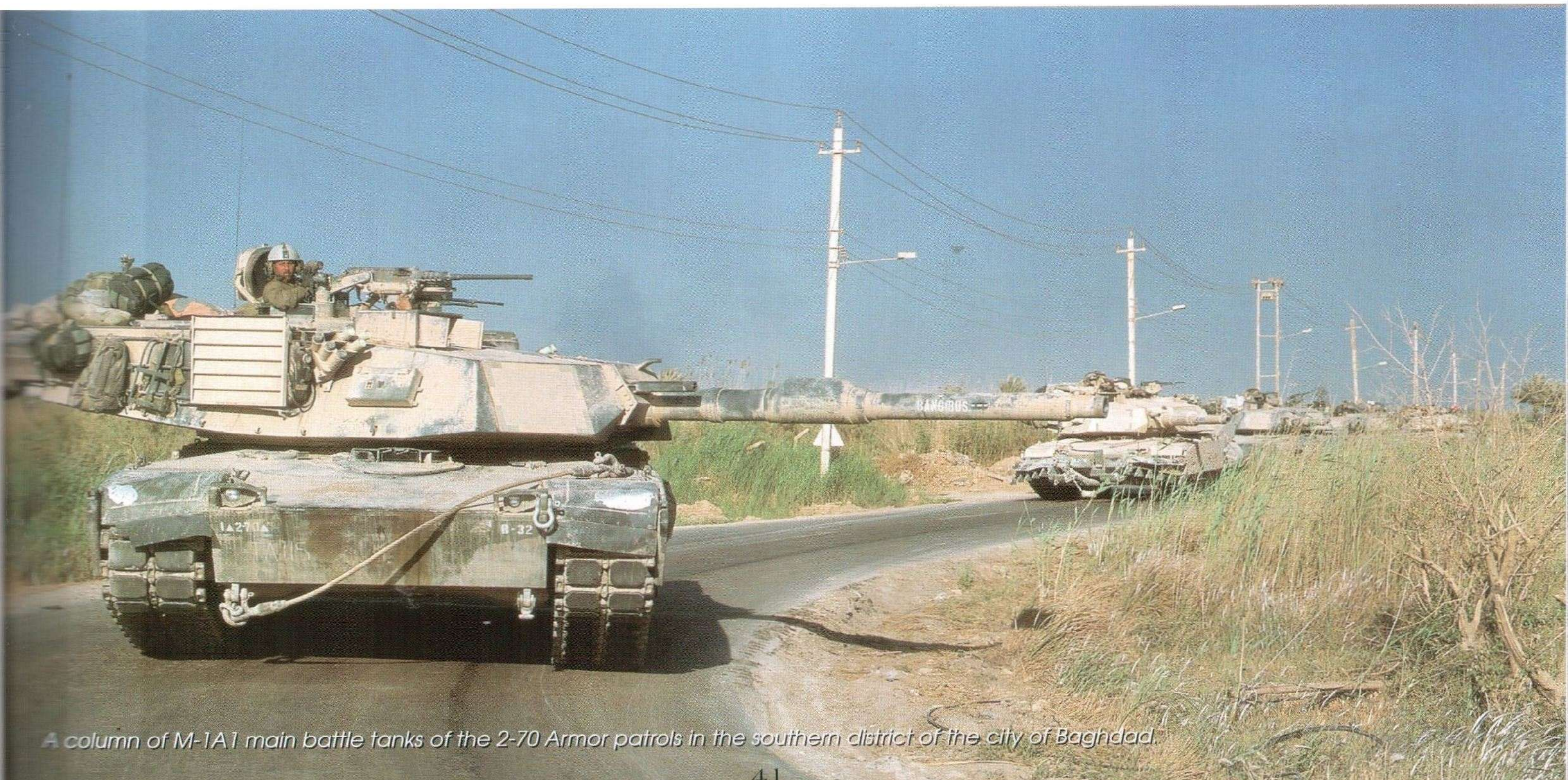
"Old Ironside" and "Screaming Eagles"



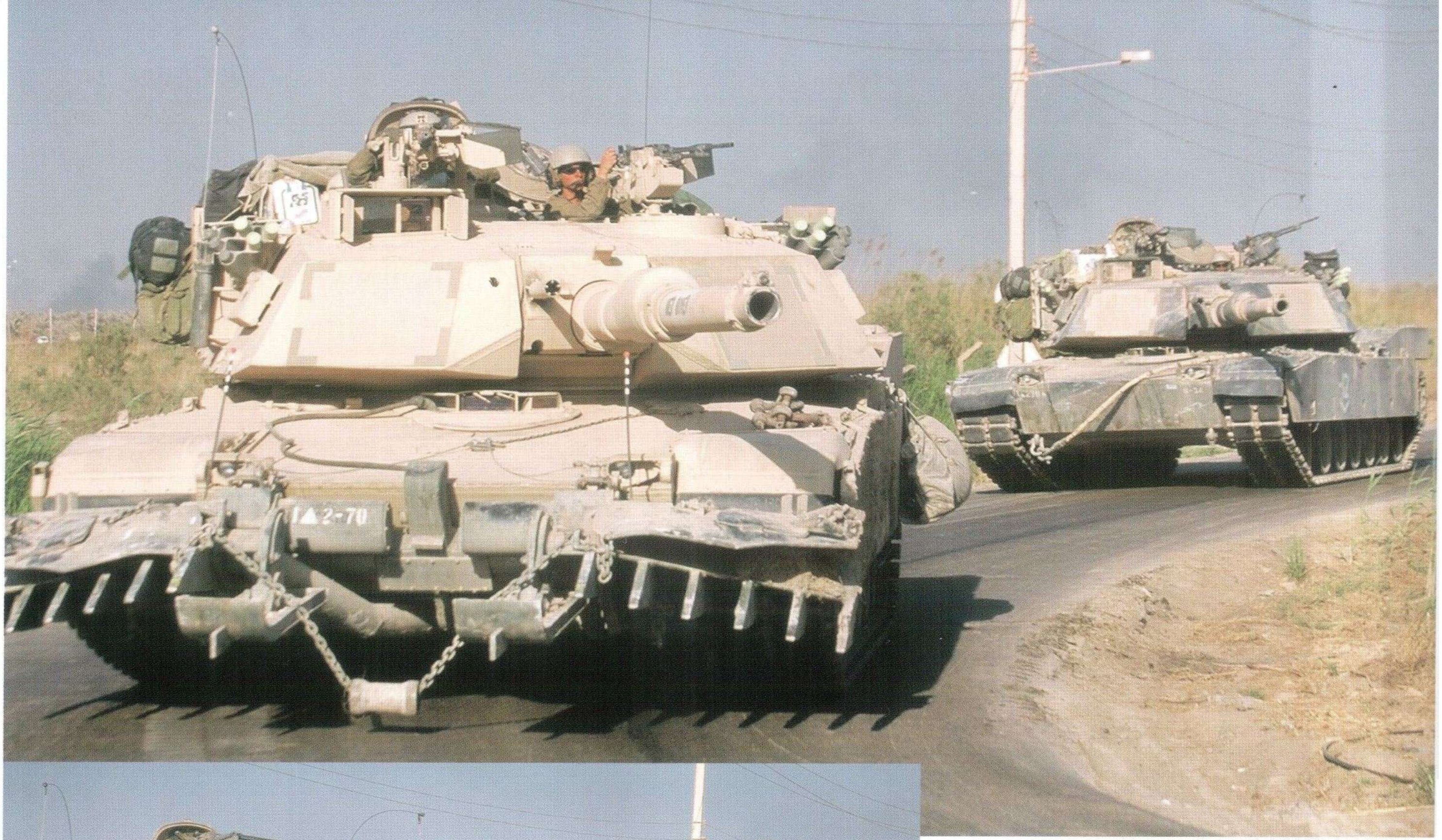
M-2/M-3 Bradleys belonging to the 1-41 Infantry take up a position in the western district of Baghdad.

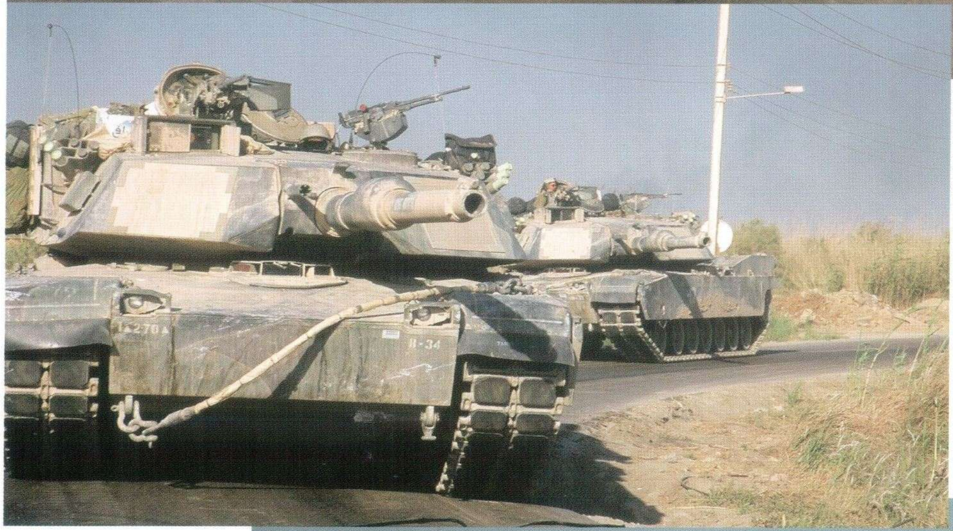
On 11 and 12 April, while the 3rd Infantry Division was reorganizing, retaining only its 2nd Brigade in the city, reinforcements arrived in Baghdad, on the west bank of the Tigris. For the American headquarters, the situation was far from being cleared up, and it was necessary to inject the maximum amount of troops to control the main axes of the city. The arrival of the Marines at the Place of Paradise and the GIs at Saddam's palace gave the press the impression that Baghdad was under the control of the US forces. Once again, the journalists made an inaccurate assumption based on their lack of knowledge about the military. One cannot say you control New York City if you occupy only Brooklyn and Manhattan.

On the afternoon of 11 April, the 600 soldiers of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Armored Division "Old Ironside" and a brigade of the 101st Airborne (Air Assault) Division "Screaming Eagles" arrived in Baghdad.



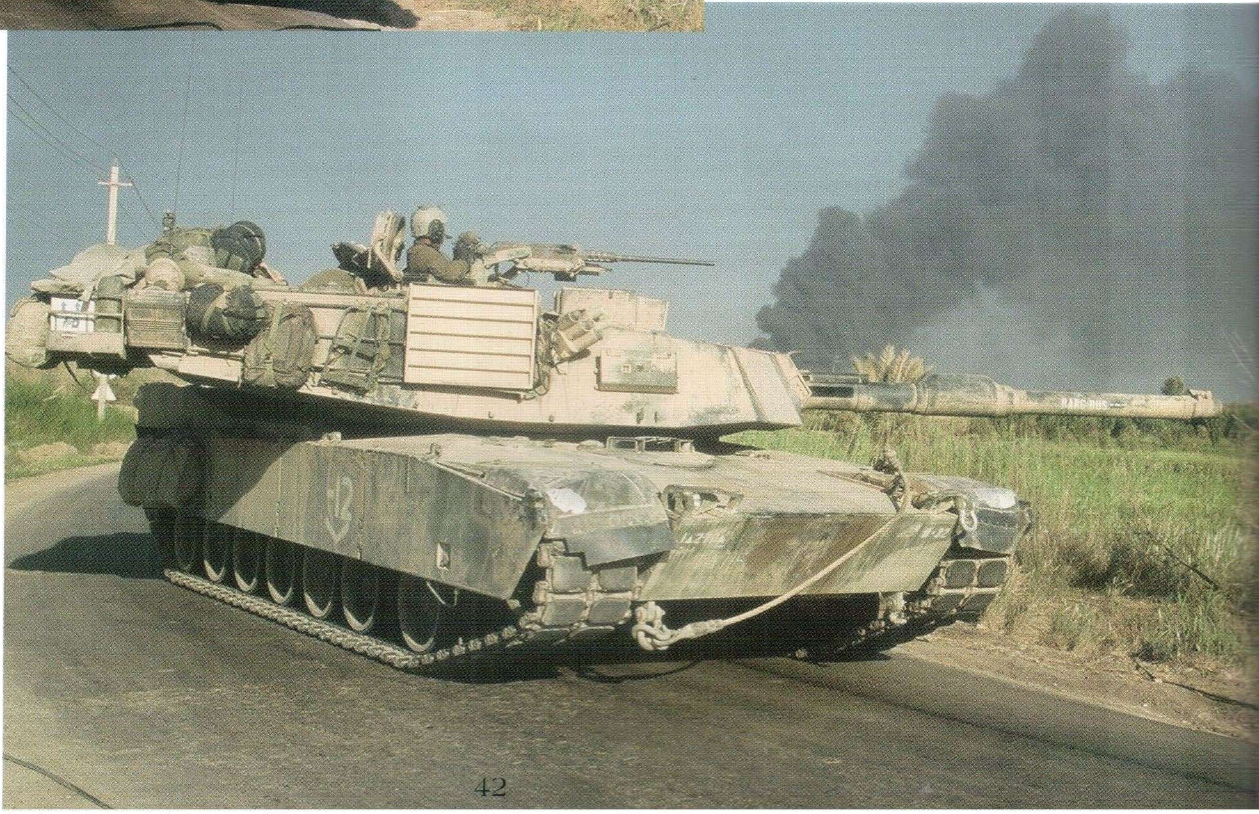
A column of M-1A1 main battle tanks of the 2-70 Armor patrols in the southern district of the city of Baghdad.



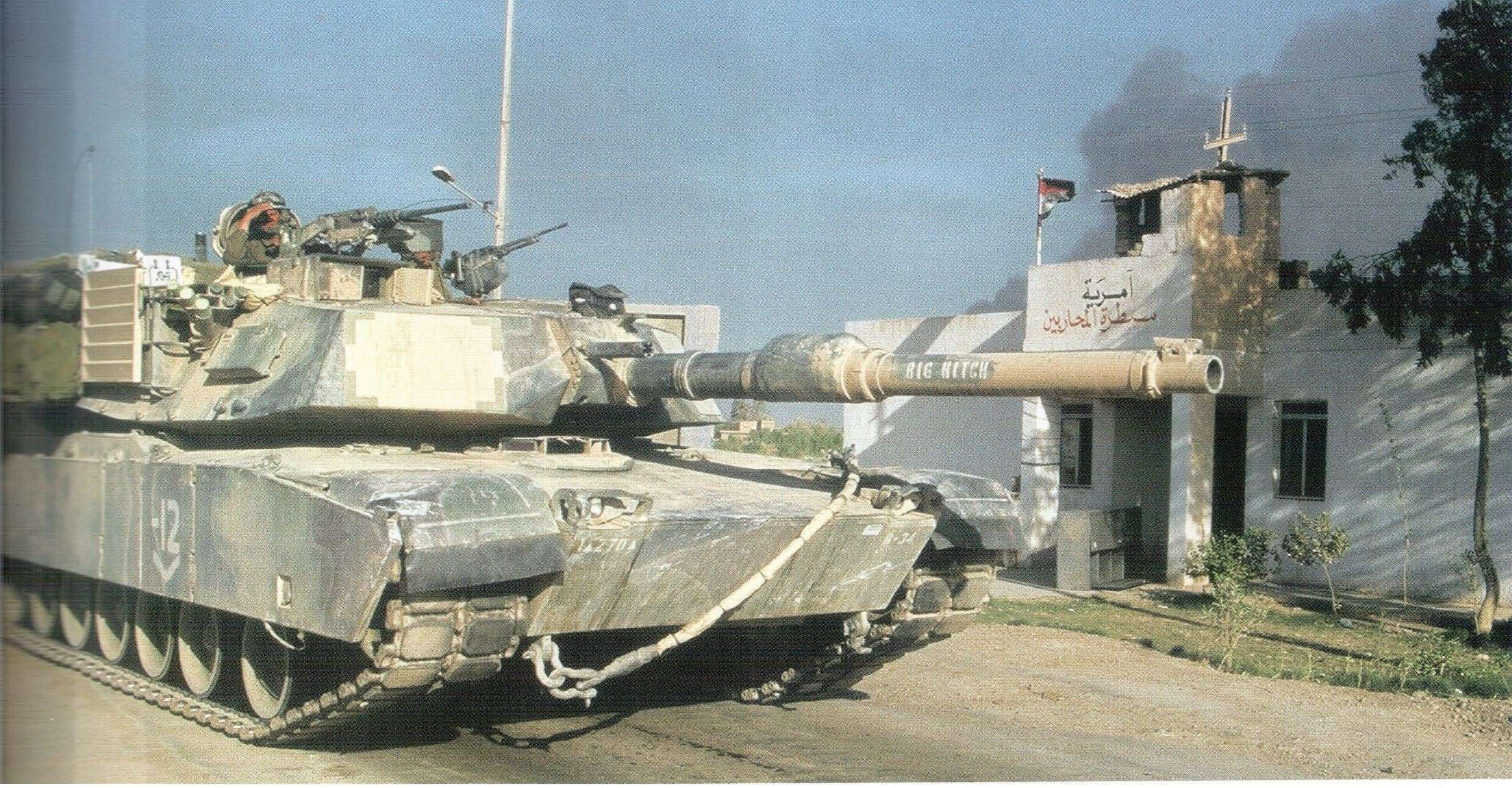


The large rectangle on the sides of the turrets of the M-1 tanks is a patch that reacts to the presence of chemicals. If toxic products are encountered, that area changes color.

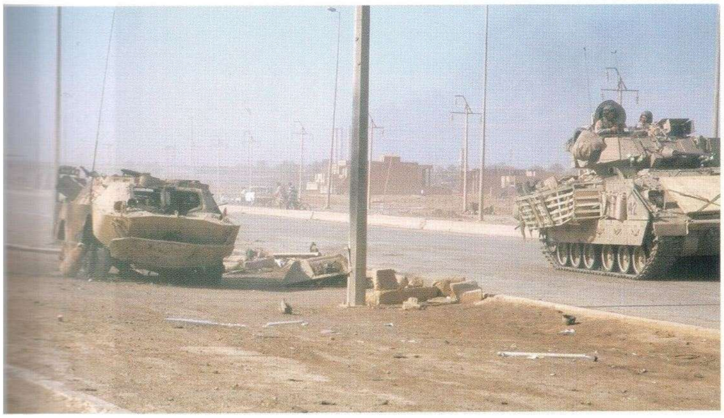
Curiously, no Bradley infantry fighting vehicles accompany this column of M-1A1 Abrams tanks as it patrols.



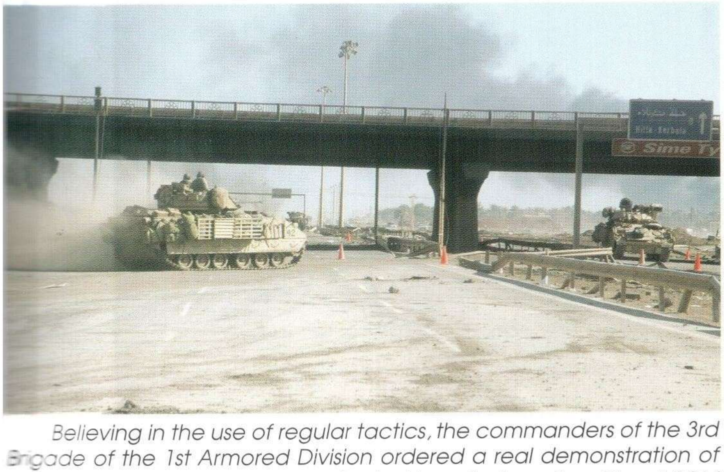
The thick plume of black smoke in the background behind these M-1A1s of the 2-70 Armor is rising from an oil producing installation.



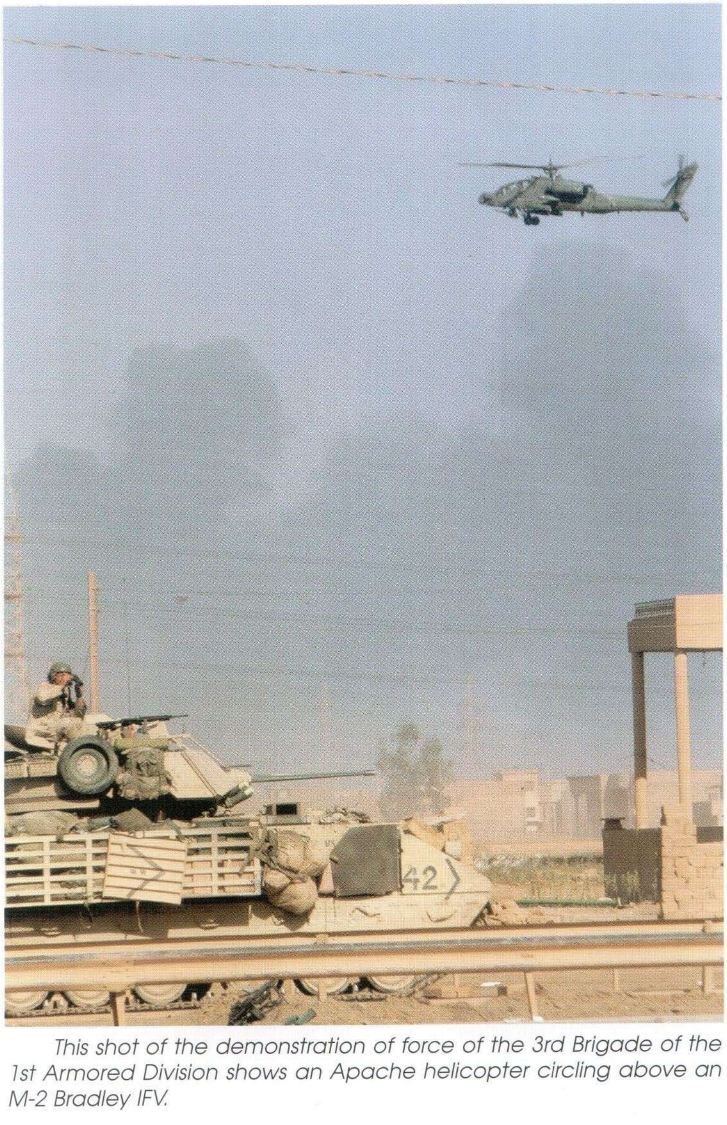
As they pass by a structure, the M-1A1 crews must exercise more caution, especially in the wake of terrorist-like attacks from diehard Saddam loyalists. Note the interesting weathering on the hull of this M-1A1.



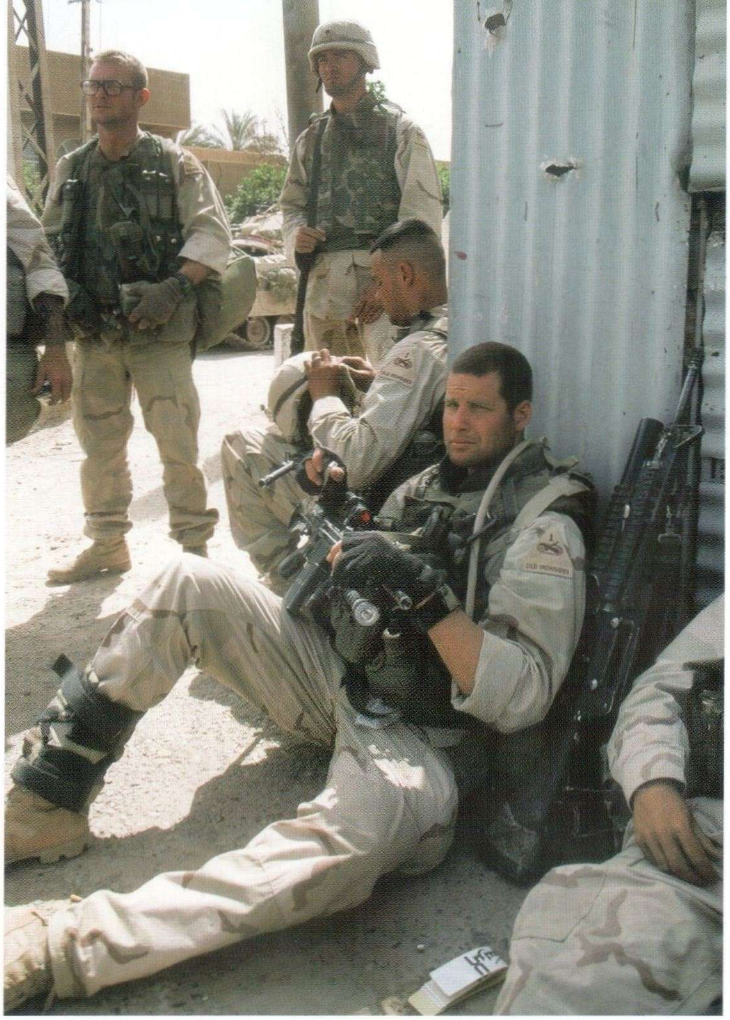
A Bradley belonging to the 1-41 Infantry passes by the wreck of one of the BRDM-2s photographed in flames six days earlier. The 1st Armored Division is a part of the US V Corps based in Germany. At present, for the war, the 3rd Brigade is quartered in the barracks at Fort Riley, Kansas.



Believing in the use of regular tactics, the commanders of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Armored Division ordered a real demonstration of force in Baghdad's western suburb. Nevertheless, the GIs of "Old Ironside" seem more like veterans and were much more relaxed in their attitudes than certain units of the 3rd ID.

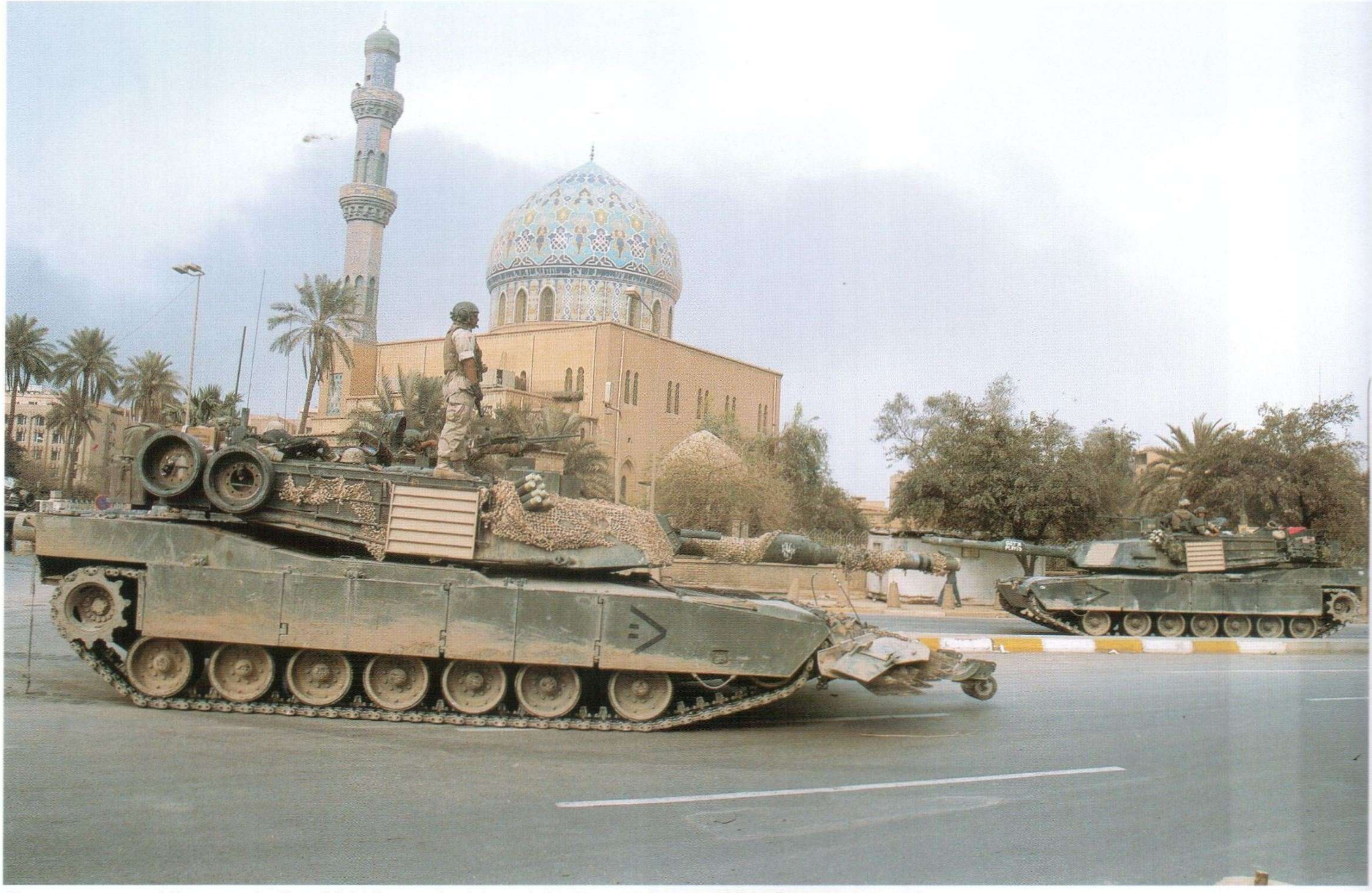


This shot of the demonstration of force of the 3rd Brigade of the 1st Armored Division shows an Apache helicopter circling above an M-2 Bradley IFV.

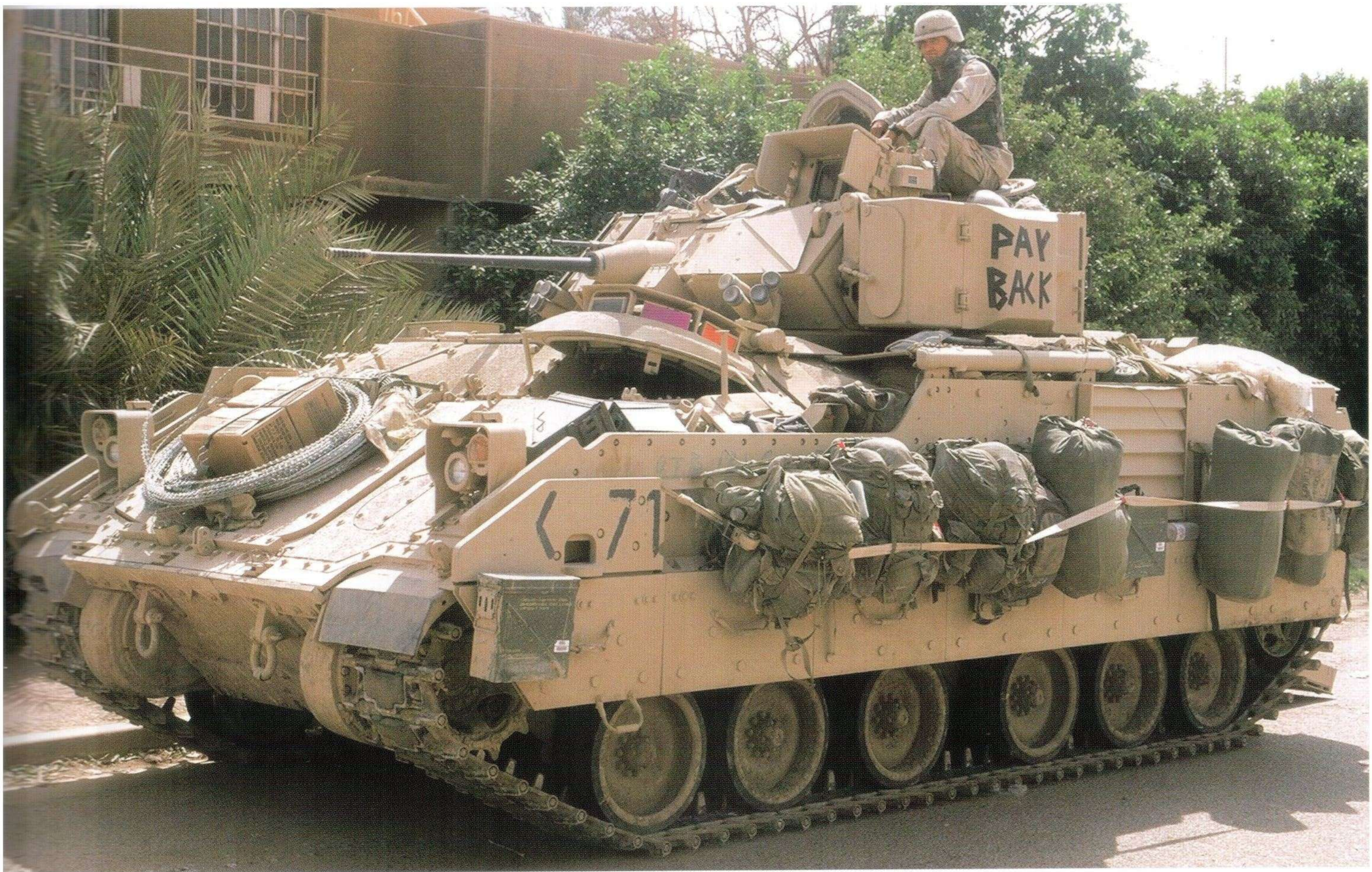


The relaxed behavior of the troops of the 1-41 Infantry went a long way toward engendering good feelings from some of the population of Baghdad. The children were the first to approach the armored vehicles carrying these men. Unlike some of the other GIs, the soldiers of the 1-41 Infantry are winning the war for the hearts of the people.

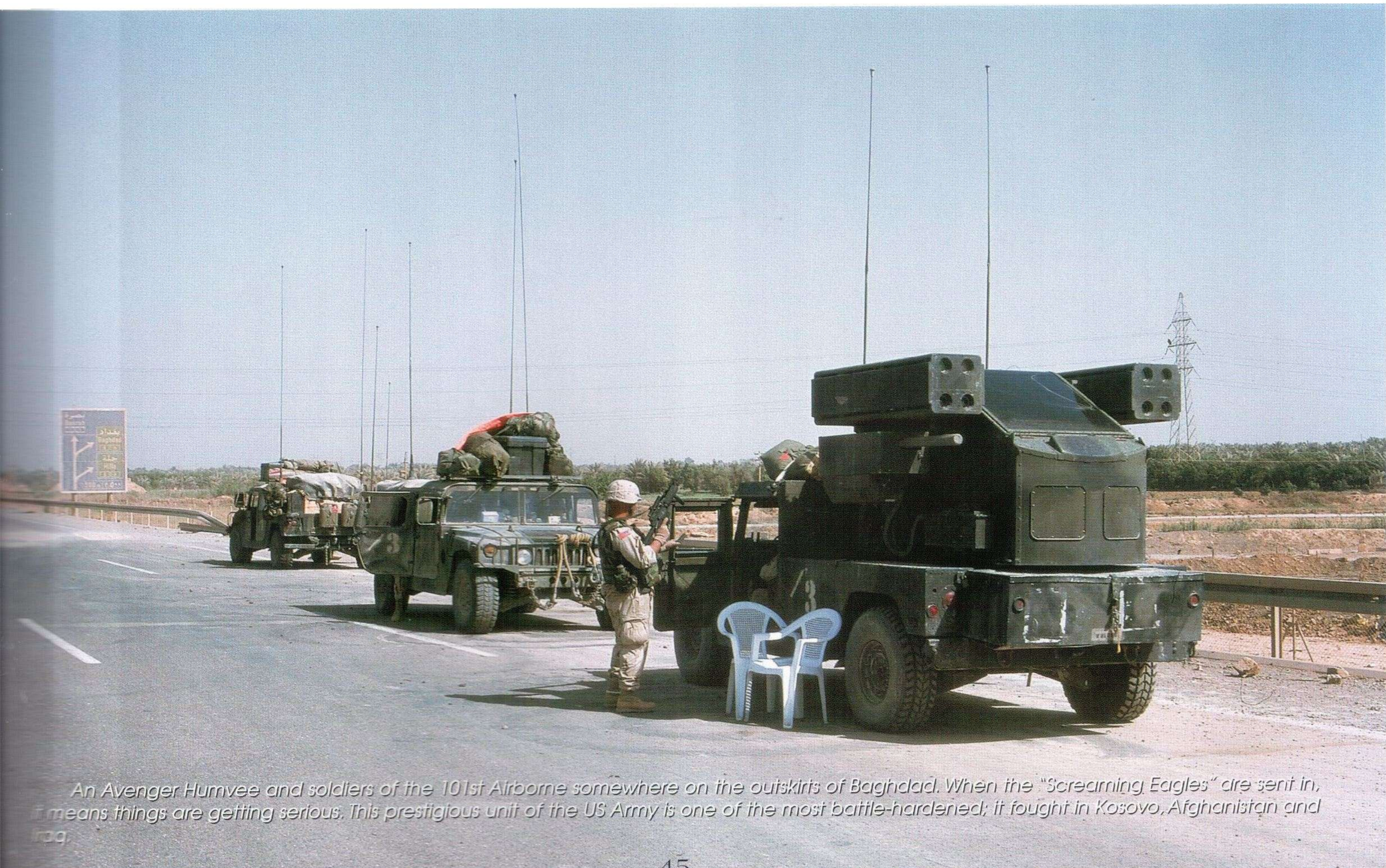
This GI from the 1-41 Infantry shows obvious signs of fatigue. He and his comrades fought hard to Karbala. The non-commissioned officer in the foreground is the only survivor of his Bradley that was destroyed by an RPG-7 rocket during the crossing of the Euphrates. "Fortunately, nobody was killed," he told the author, "but I am the only person that was not wounded." Note the subdued color of his "Old Ironside" shoulder patch.



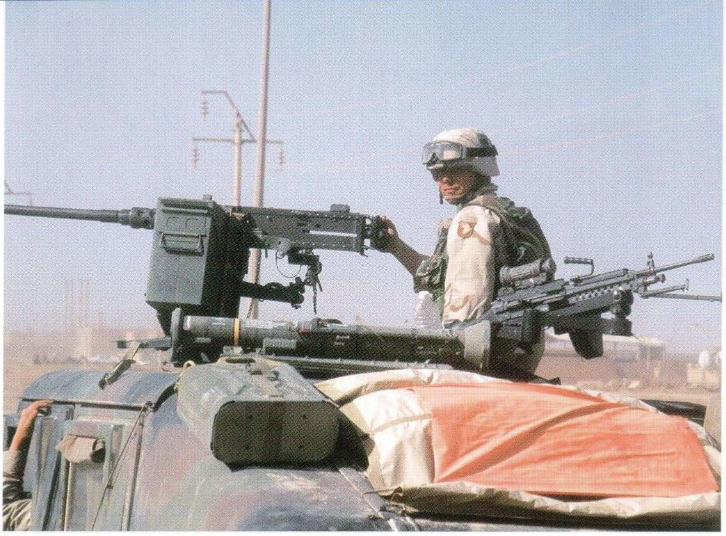
The presence of these patrolling M-1A1s no doubt explains the existence of the Fedayeen resistance.



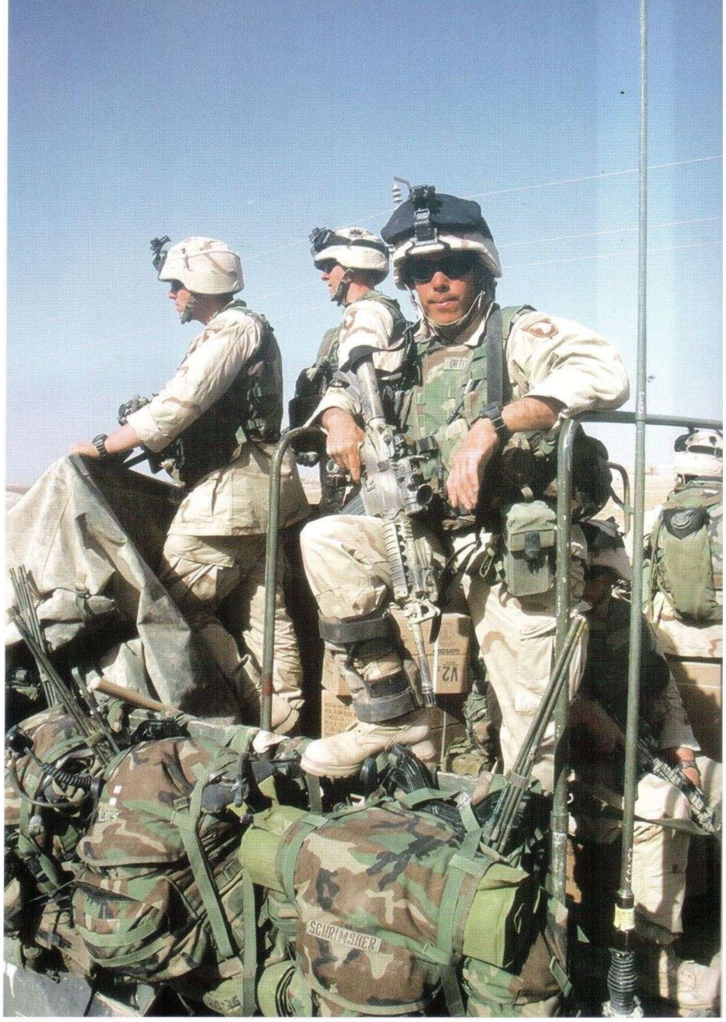
M2 Bradley "Pay Back" of 1-41 Infantry mans a roadblock in the western district of Baghdad. Note the amount of gear hanging on the side of the vehicle.



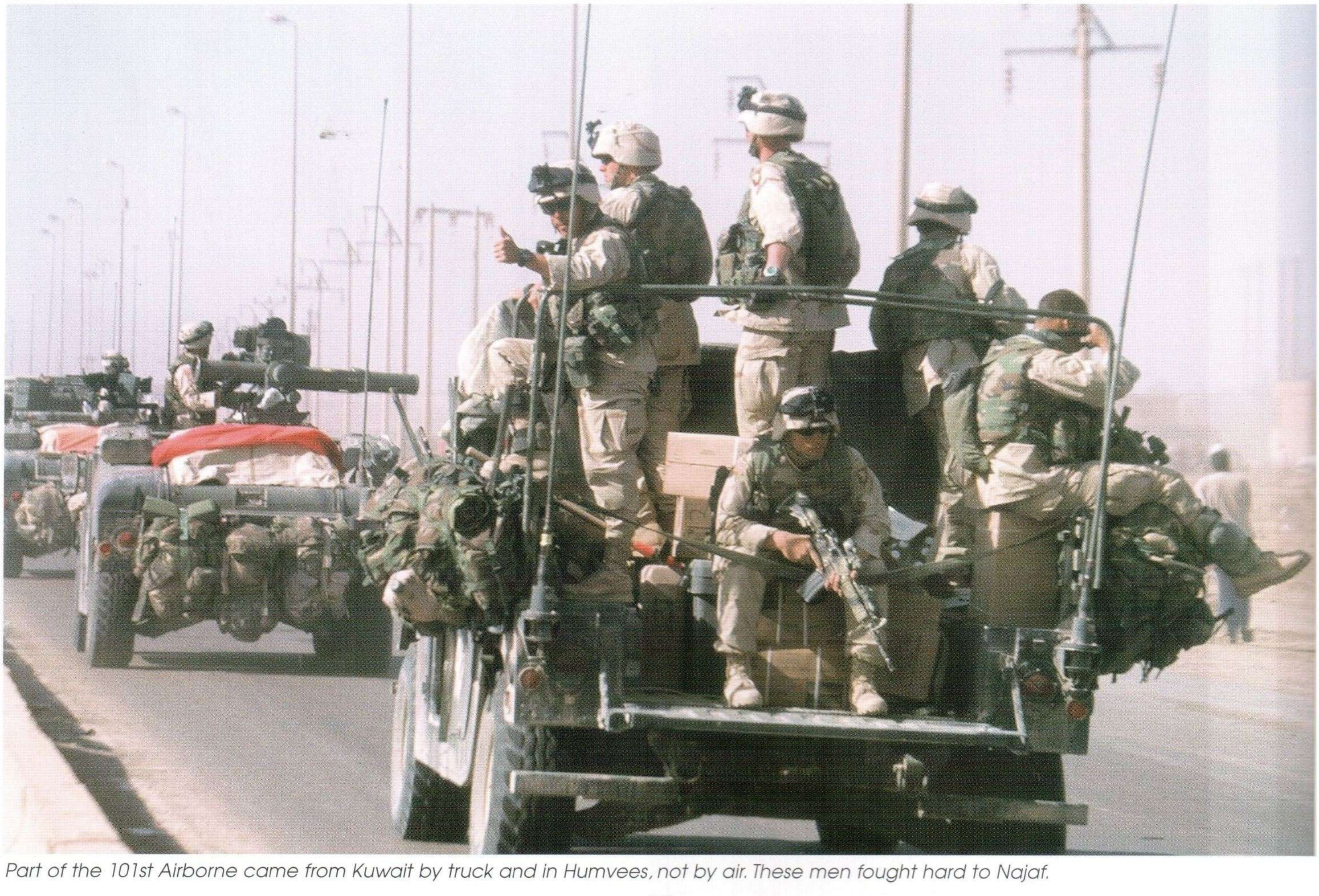
An Avenger Humvee and soldiers of the 101st Airborne somewhere on the outskirts of Baghdad. When the "Screaming Eagles" are sent in, it means things are getting serious. This prestigious unit of the US Army is one of the most battle-hardened; it fought in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.



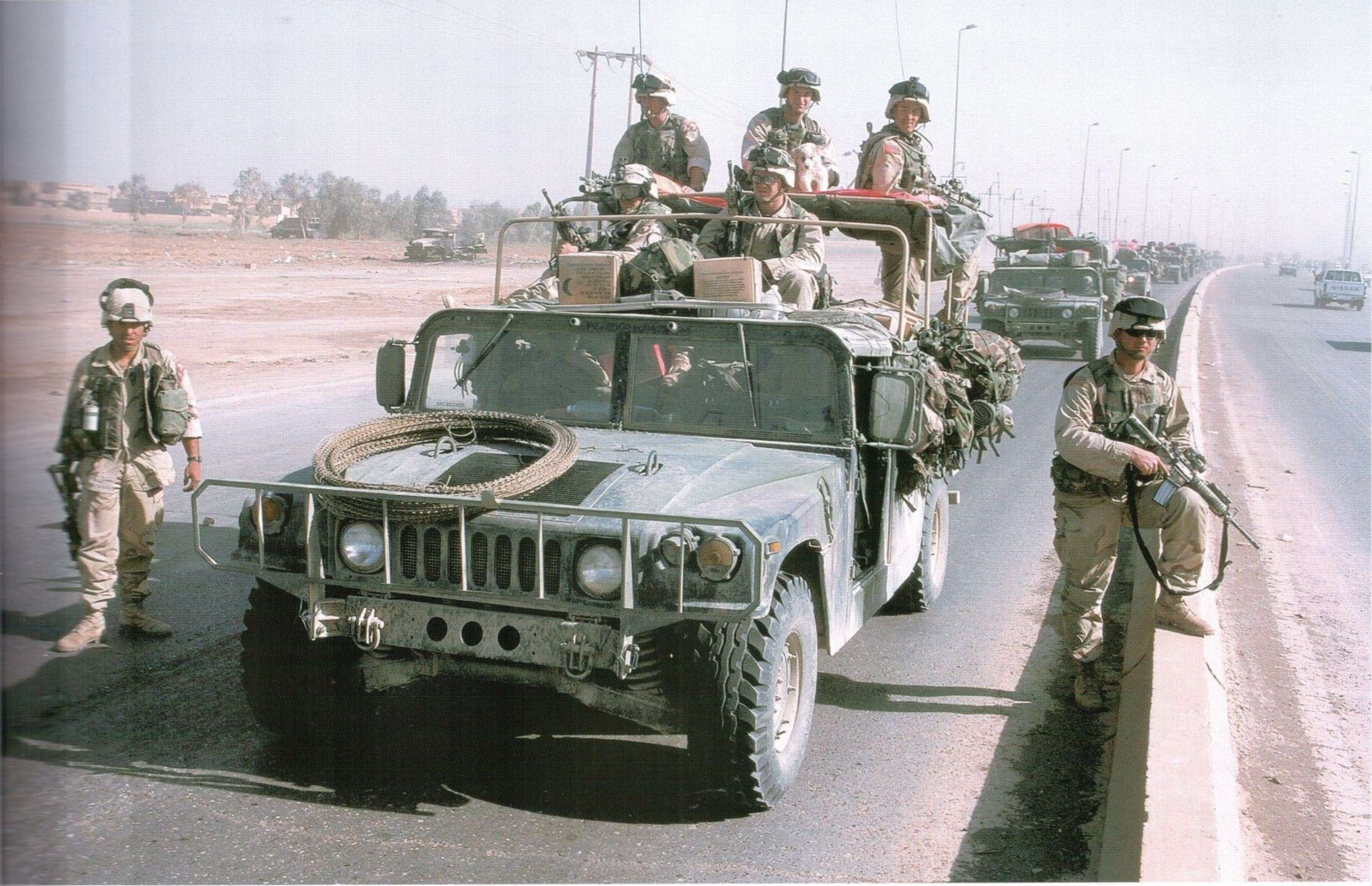
This machine gunner gives the impression that he is manning three weapons at once: a .50-cal (12.7mm) M-2 machine gun, the M249 SAW (Squad Automatic Weapon) at right, and the AT-4 lying on the roof of the vehicle.



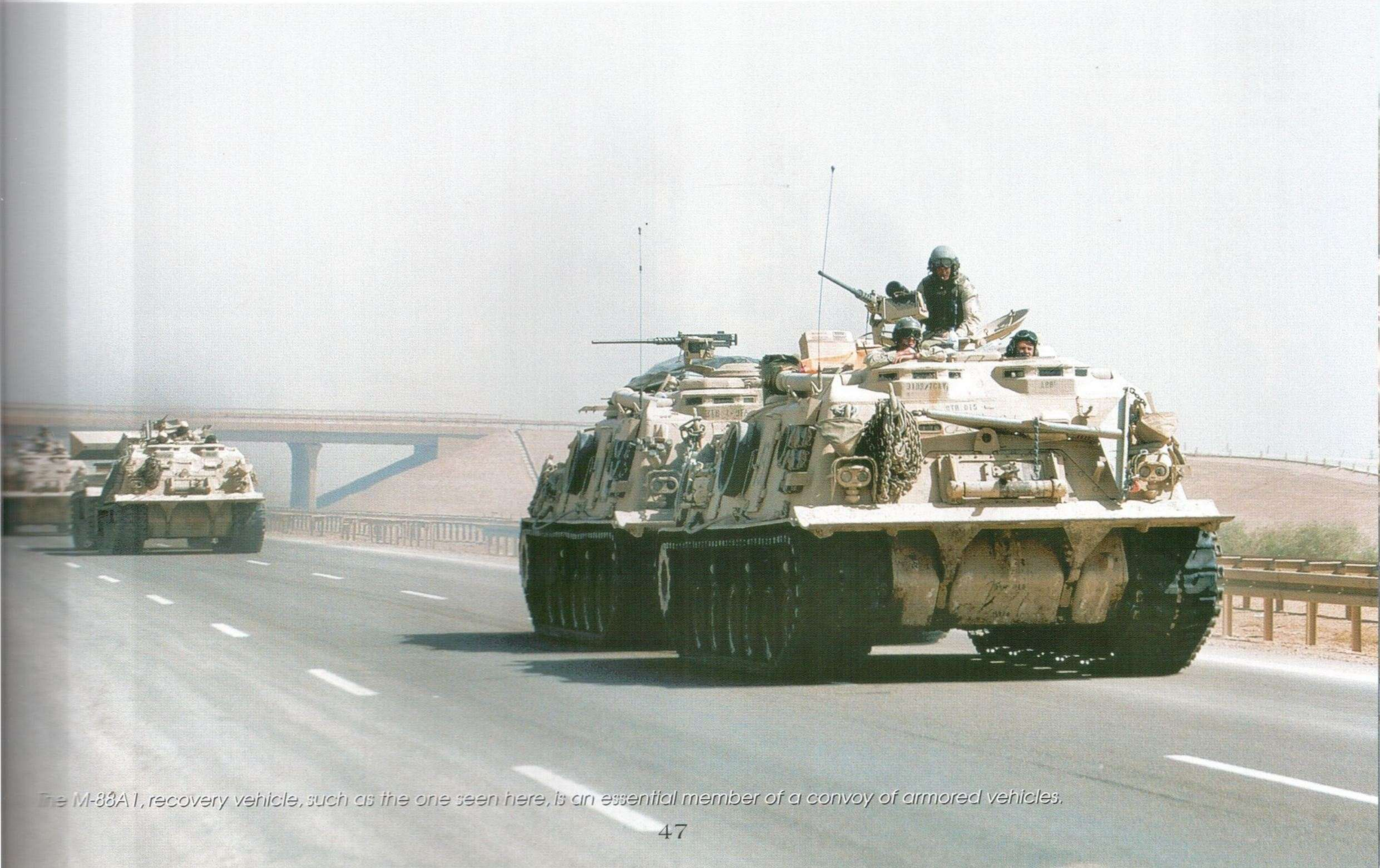
This "Screaming Eagle" poses for the camera. Note the camouflaged M-4 assault rifle and subdued 101st Airborne patch on his shoulder.



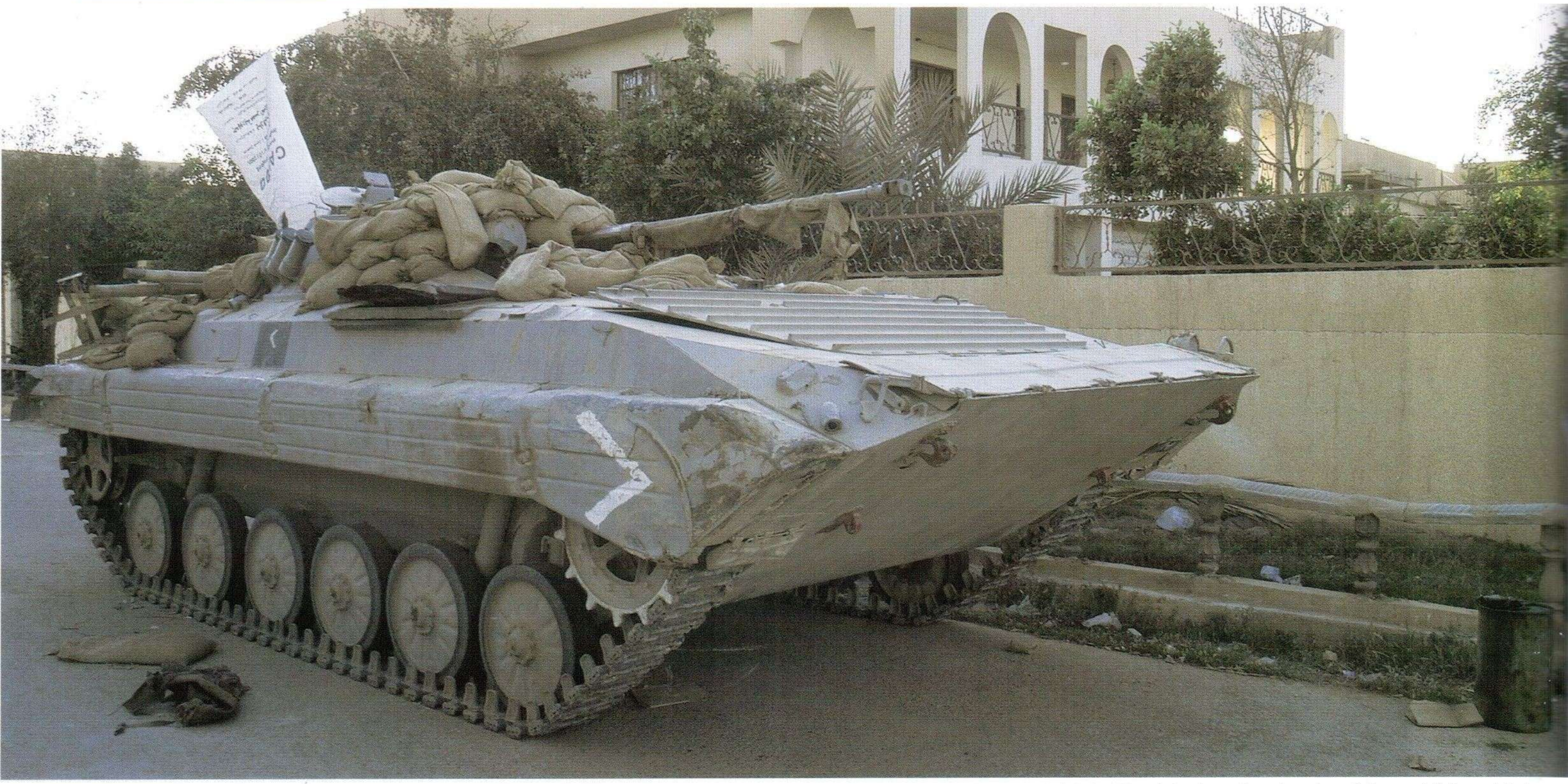
Part of the 101st Airborne came from Kuwait by truck and in Humvees, not by air. These men fought hard to Najaf.



Paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division pick a definitely un-airborne manner to enter Baghdad, riding on the back of a Humvee.



The M-88A1, recovery vehicle, such as the one seen here, is an essential member of a convoy of armored vehicles.



A BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicle sits on a street somewhere in one of Baghdad's northern districts. The Marines had not yet found this vehicle when it was photographed. Note the crudely painted chevron (the insignia of the coalition forces) apparently painted to confuse the members of an American tank crew. Local residents attached a white bag to the antenna to alert the Americans to its presence.

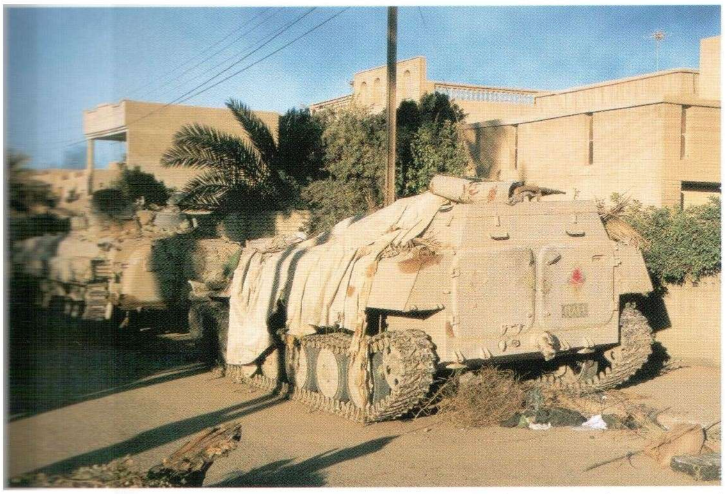
Following the official end to hostilities in Iraq, the country was strewn with the wreckage of tanks and equipment, as well as the corpses of the dead. The premier army of the Middle East, which existed twelve years ago, is now only a recollection. Deprived of a chain of command by the relentless air-land battle waged by the coalition forces, Saddam's army just collapsed. A weakening of the military leadership and the beheading of the best elements of the Iraqi political minds – like Stalin's purges in 1937 – deprived the country of its ability to defend itself.

A country that resists can inflict great losses on its foe. Considering the war was begun without UN support, many felt that if the America military came up against stiff resistance that inflicted great loss within its ranks, it would be forced to negotiate. Iraq needed a strong person to organize resistance and drive out its corrupt leaders.

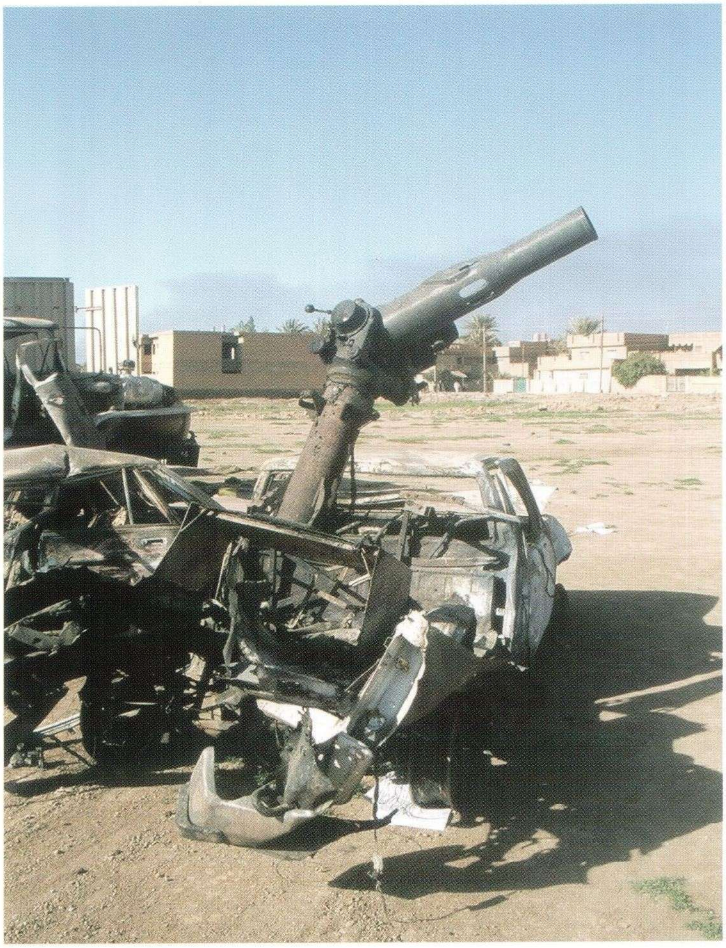
This BMD-1 was destroyed beneath the south beltway road not far from the barracks that supposedly housed Iraqi and Palestinian airborne troops, based on the badges painted on the walls.

This photograph proves that Iraq was equipped with BMD-1 armored cars like the ones Russian paratroops use.

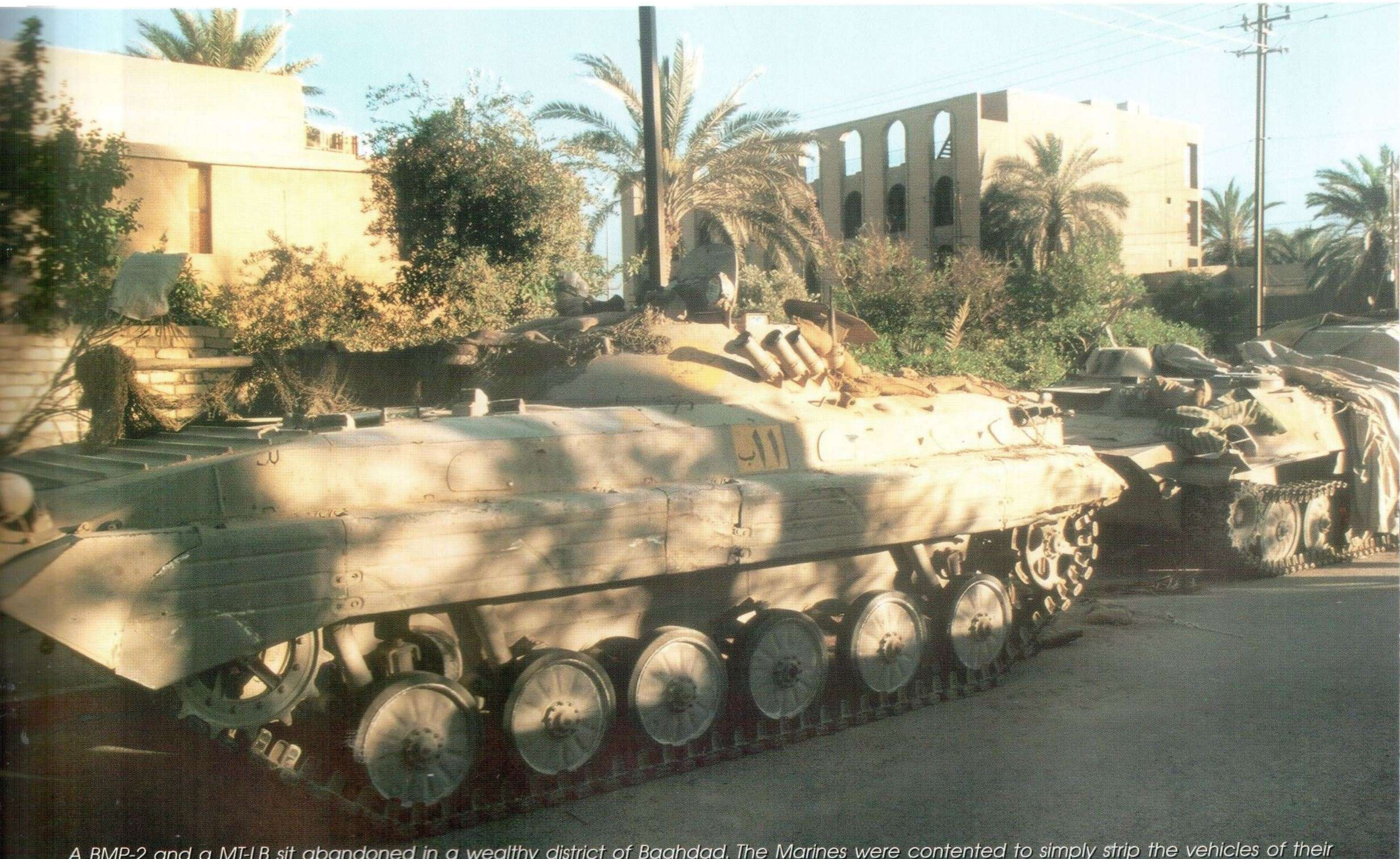
There is little doubt that this BMD-1 was blown up by a TOW after it was abandoned by its crew.



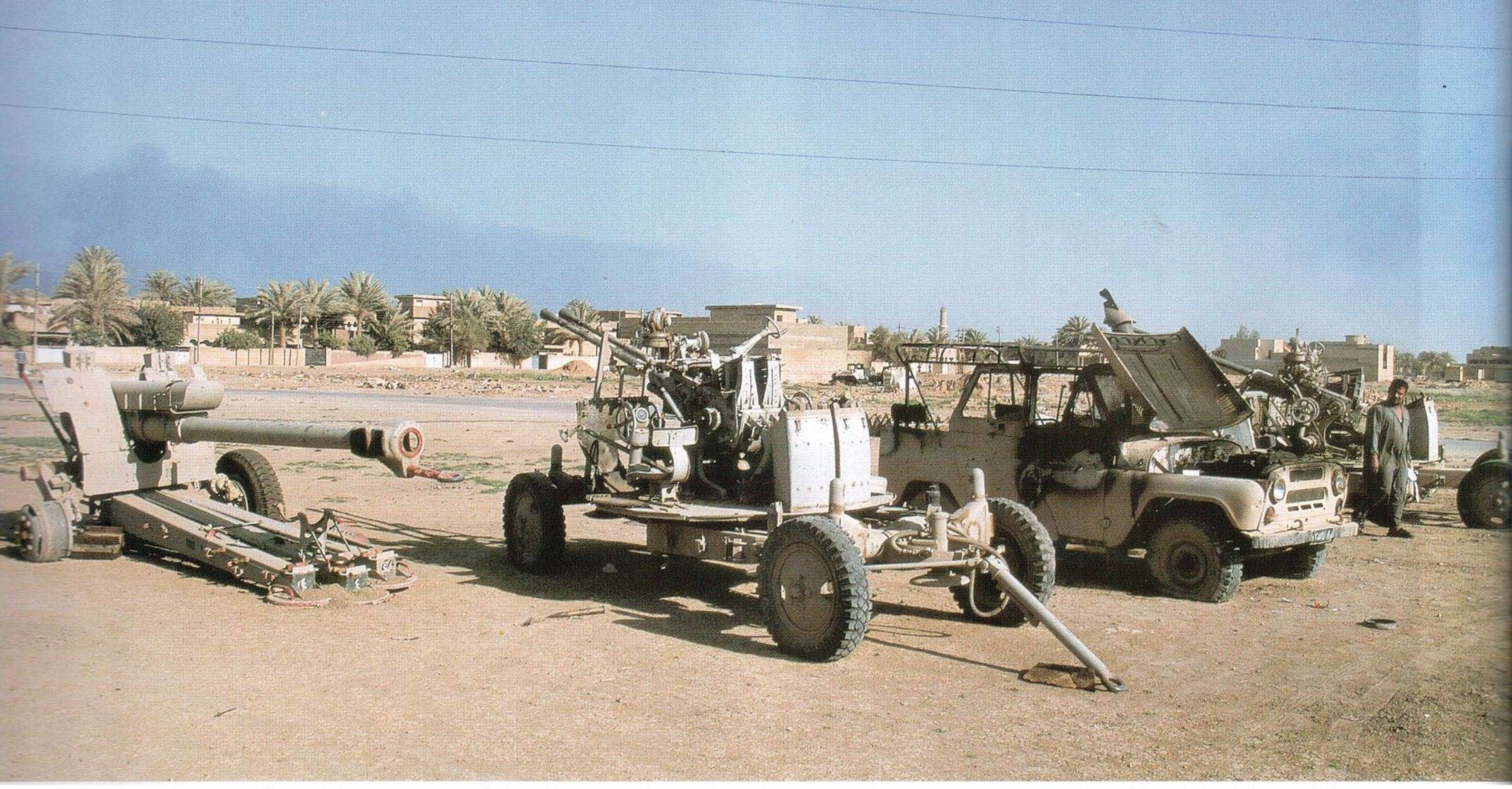
The Iraqis also left behind this Russian MT-LB armored personnel carrier.



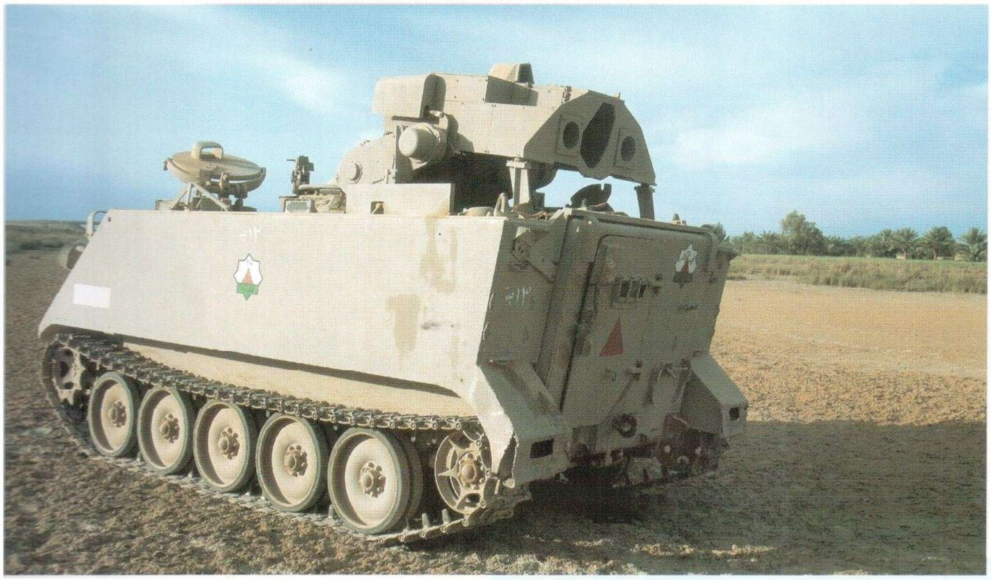
This 4x4 TOW vehicle participated in the fight of 5 April west of Baghdad. The weapon was captured from the Iranian Army. This brings to mind the affair of Oliver North who supplied weapons to the Islamic Army of Iran to help finance the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s.



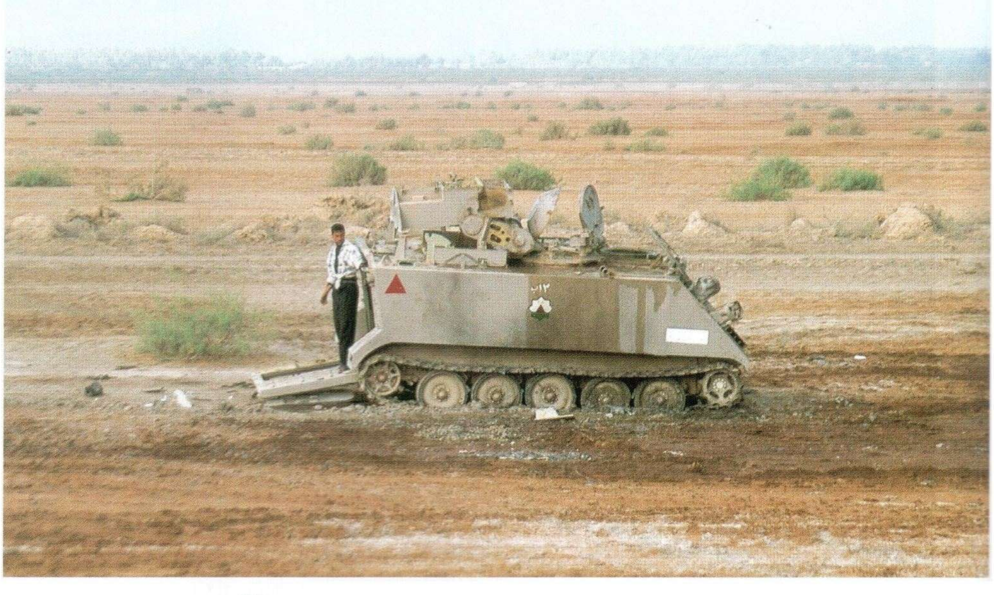
A BMP-2 and a MT-LB sit abandoned in a wealthy district of Baghdad. The Marines were contented to simply strip the vehicles of their individual armament.



The Americans gathered together a variety of Iraqi equipment and weapons in an open area south of Baghdad. One of the weapons is a D-30 122mm gun.



Fifty kilometers south of Baghdad, the Baghdad Division of the Republican Guard abandoned a platoon of M901 anti-tank vehicles. The TOW-equipped vehicles were apparently in good condition.



The abandoned M901 anti-tank vehicles were probably captured in Kuwait in 1991 (the emirate had received 58 of them). The extra missiles probably came from Jordan. The coalition forces repeatedly seized ammunition obtained from the Royal Jordanian Army.

Clash of Armor: Challengers vs T-55s

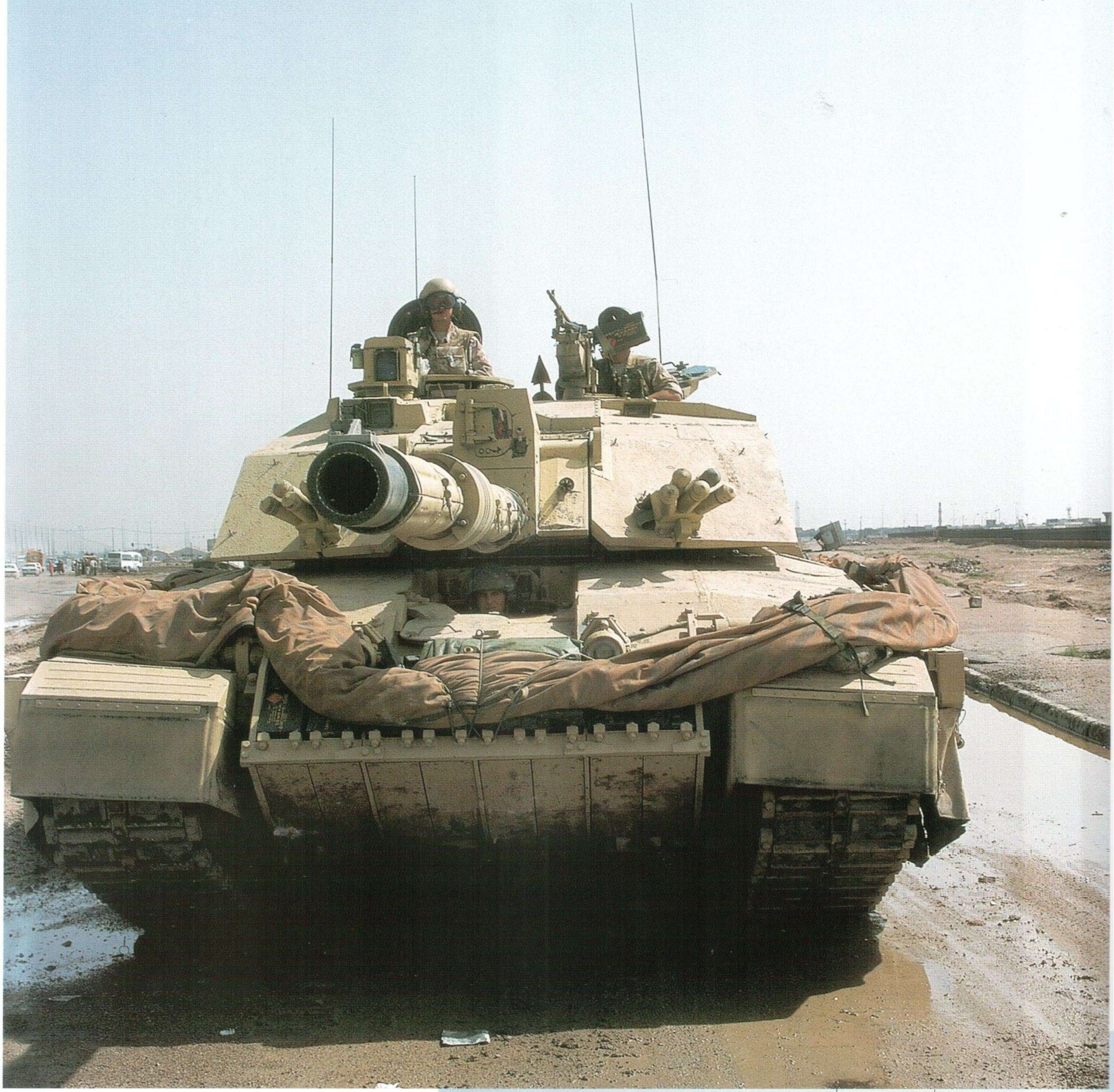
The Challenger 2 gave no chance to the T-55s of the enemy forces.

Contrary to the enthusiasm of British Prime Minister Tony Blair, British public opinion was wildly set against the war in Iraq. The British servicemen, who must obey orders without emotion, conducted a brilliant operation against Basra. Operation "Telic" is a model of that type of action that experts will no doubt want to analyze. Further, because of their seriousness and warm-heartedness toward the press, the "Desert Rats" earned high praise from the press.

Following an intentionally slow advance that served as a show of force and gave the enemy a chance to withdraw without fighting, the "Desert Rats" of the 7th Armoured Brigade forced an entry into Basra. At dawn on 6 April, they penetrated into the heart of the second most important city in Iraq by means of three routes. This strategy avoided unnecessary loss, especially collateral damage, so as not to incur the wrath of he population.

The partnership of the Challenger 2 and the Warrior, coming straight from the Cold War, was the main tool in the victory. It also demonstrated that mechanized infantry, supported by 120mm gun barrels on tanks, was still queen of the battlefield.

The Challengers surprised the Iraqi tanks in the open countryside east of Basra at dawn on 28 March.

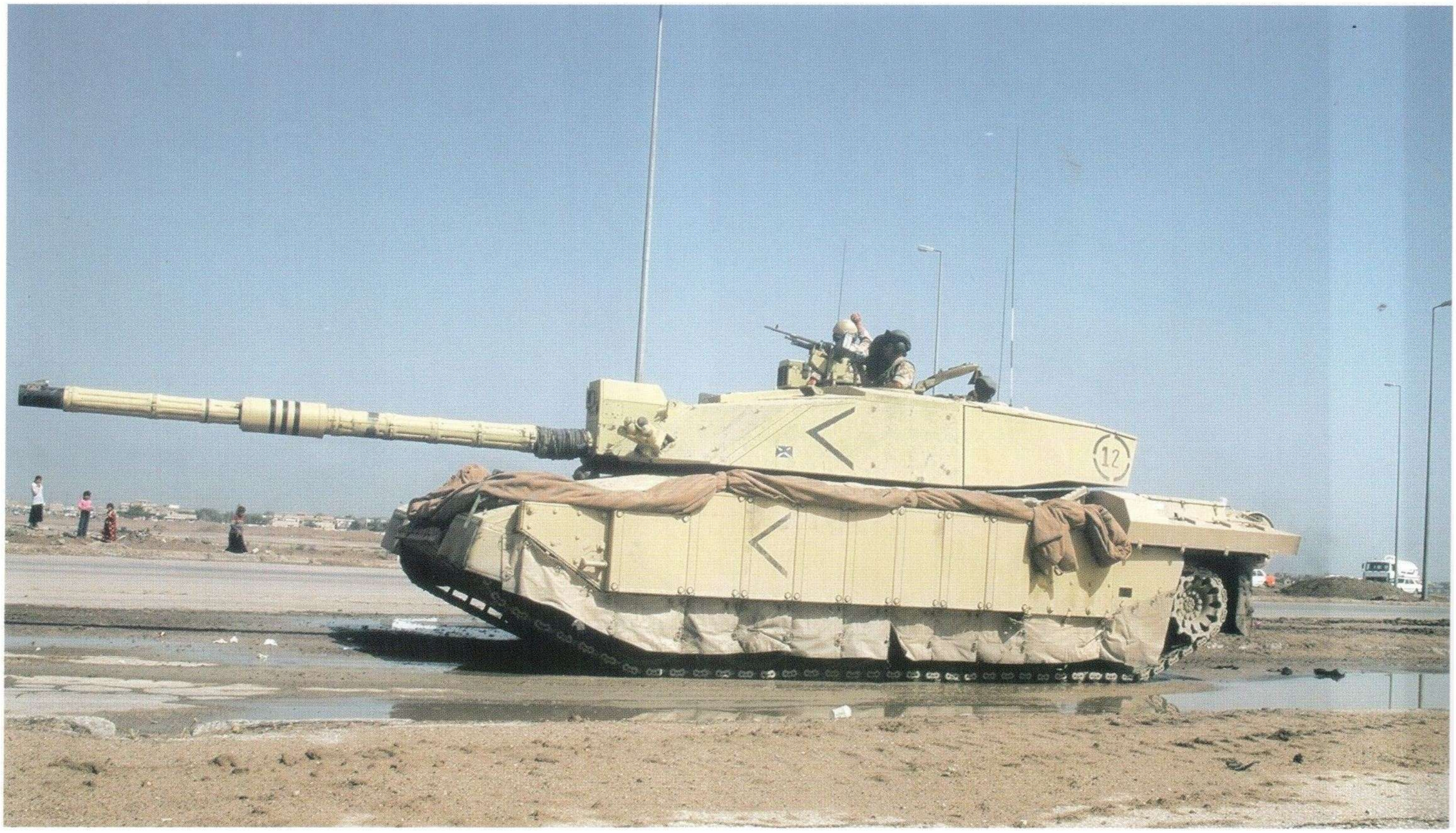


This frontal view of the Challenger 2 gives a good indication of its size. It is almost 3 meters (9ft 6in) high.

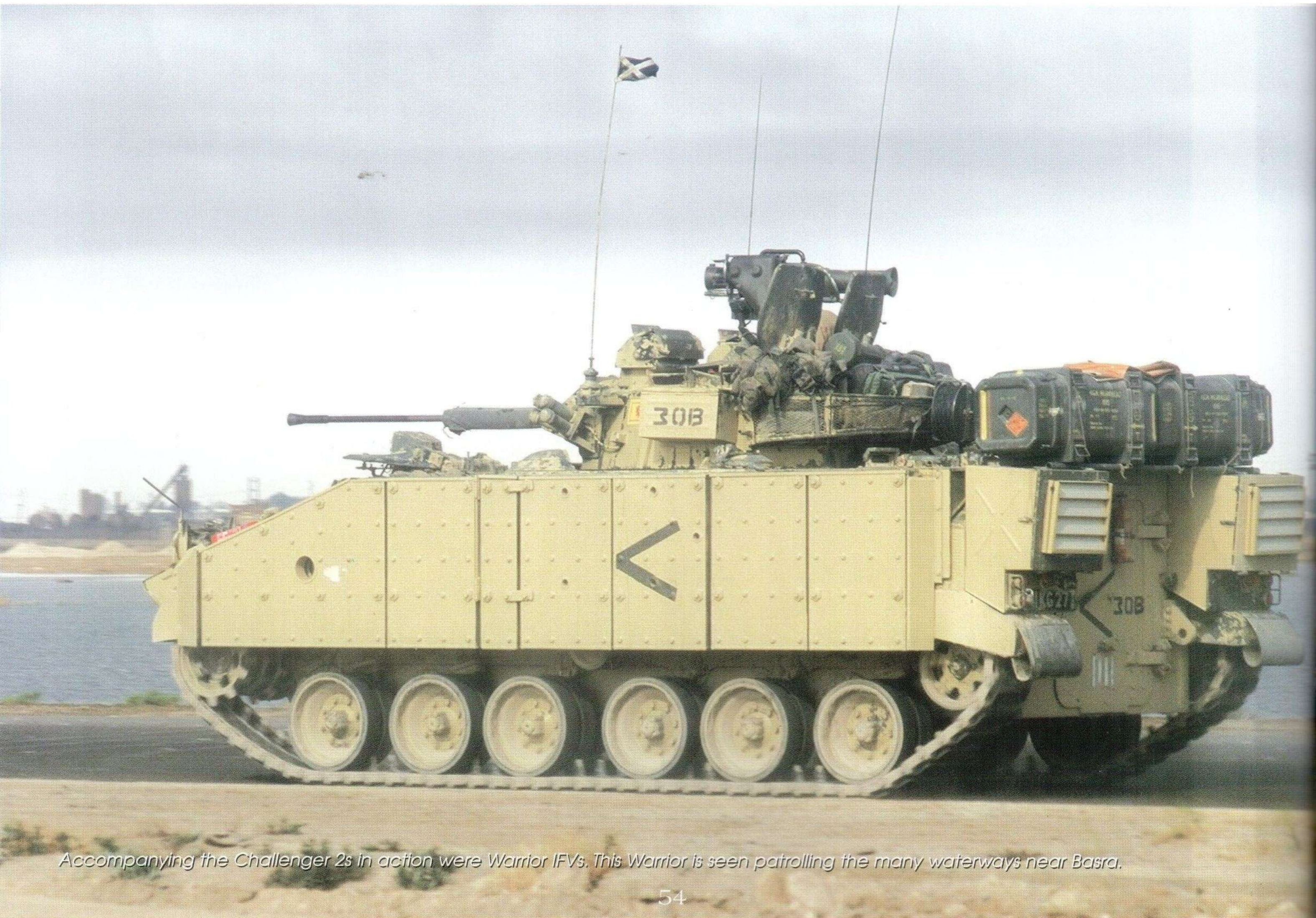
This tank belongs to the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards, descendents of the Scots Greys who are famous for their renowned cavalry charge at the Battle of Waterloo. Basra will no doubt join that celebrated conflict on the banner listing their victories.

The British have always favored a strong, heavily armored tank, and the Challenger 2 is no exception to the rule.

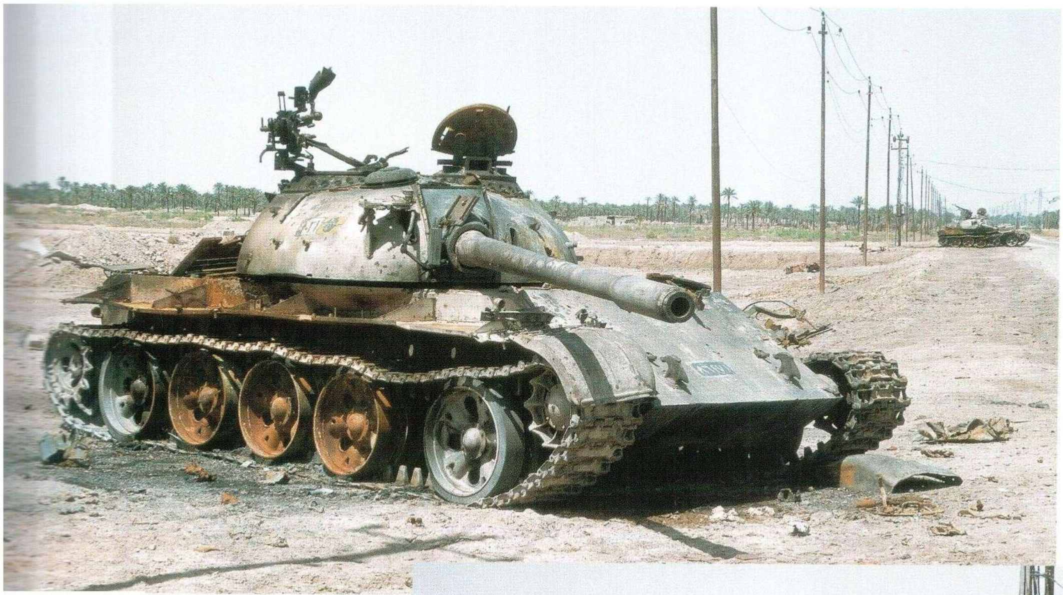
The Challenger 2 weighs in at 62 tons. Its powerful 120mm gun makes it a formidable opponent.



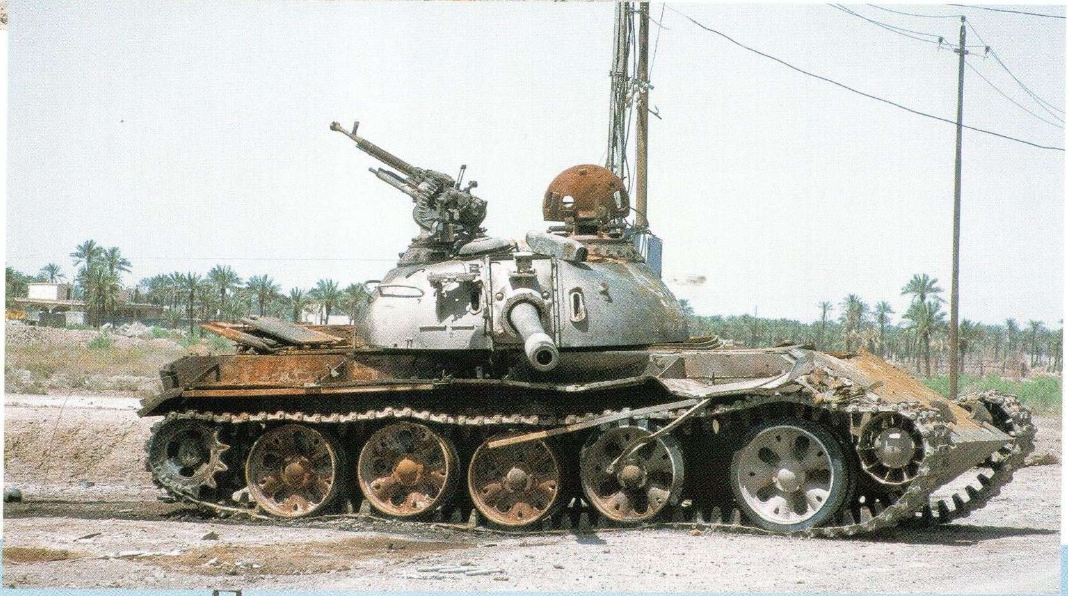
A total of 120 tropicalized Challenger 2s that participated in Exercise "Saif Sareea" in Oman two years ago were engaged in the fighting in Iraq.



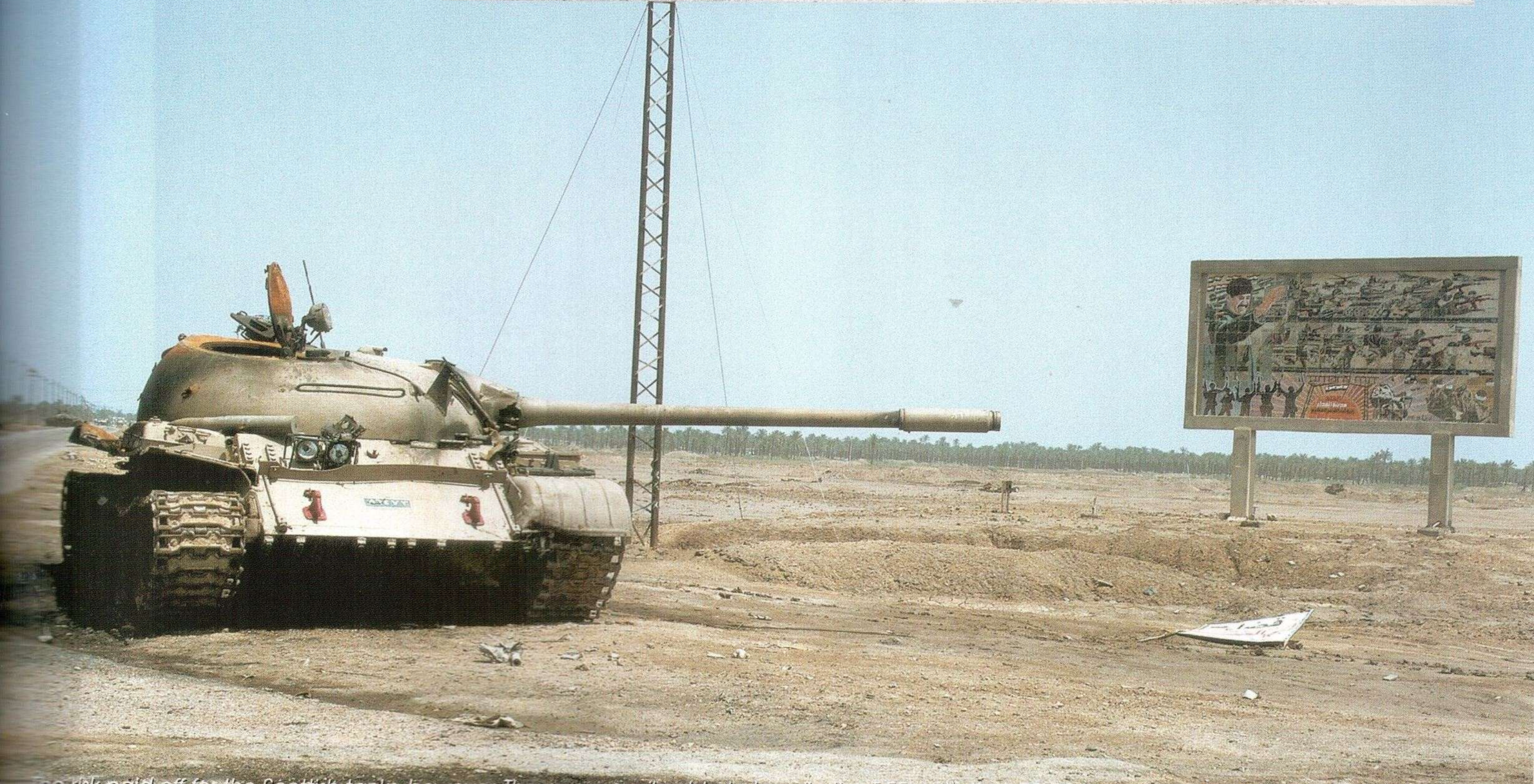
Accompanying the Challenger 2s in action were Warrior IFVs. This Warrior is seen patrolling the many waterways near Basra.



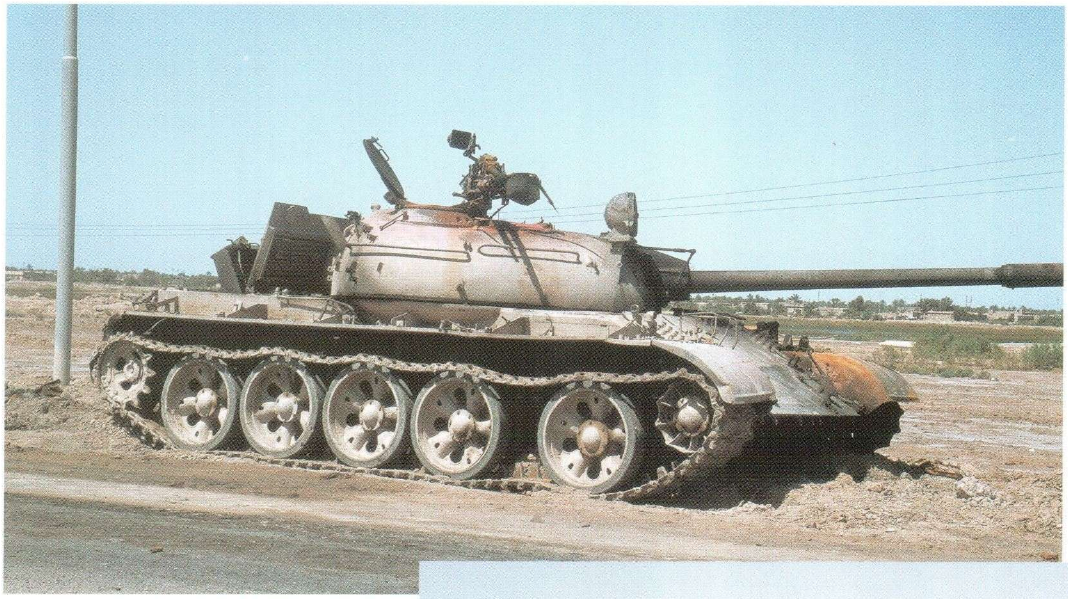
On 28 March, thinking they were protected on their right flank by a salt marsh, a company of T-55s and several troop transport vehicles tried to surprise 40 Commando of the Royal Marines.



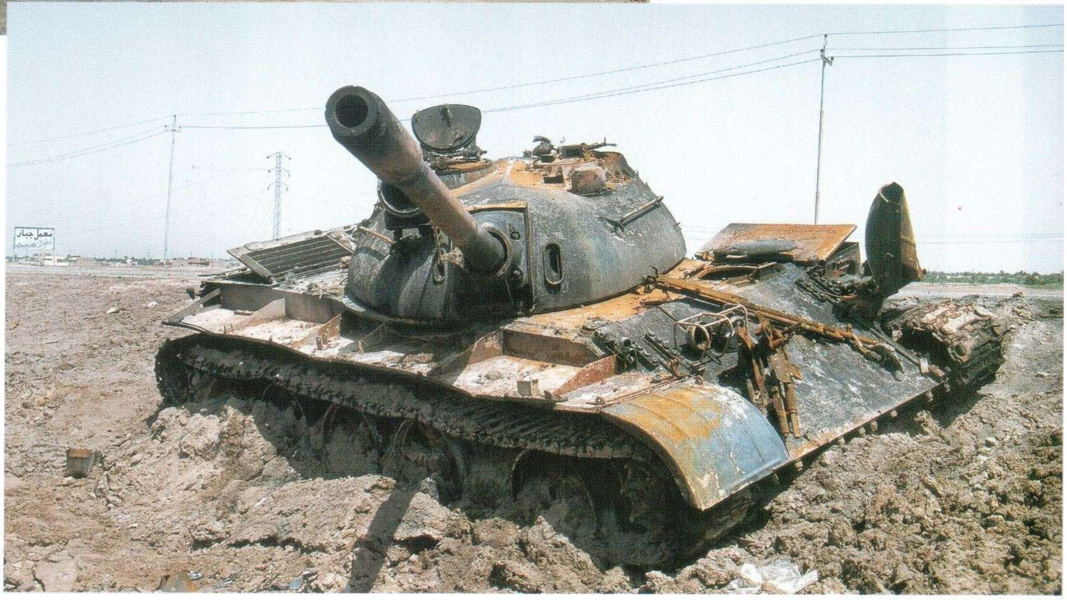
Challenger 2 tanks from C Squadron of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards took a calculated risk and engaged the T-55s on muddy trails that barely supported their heavy weight.



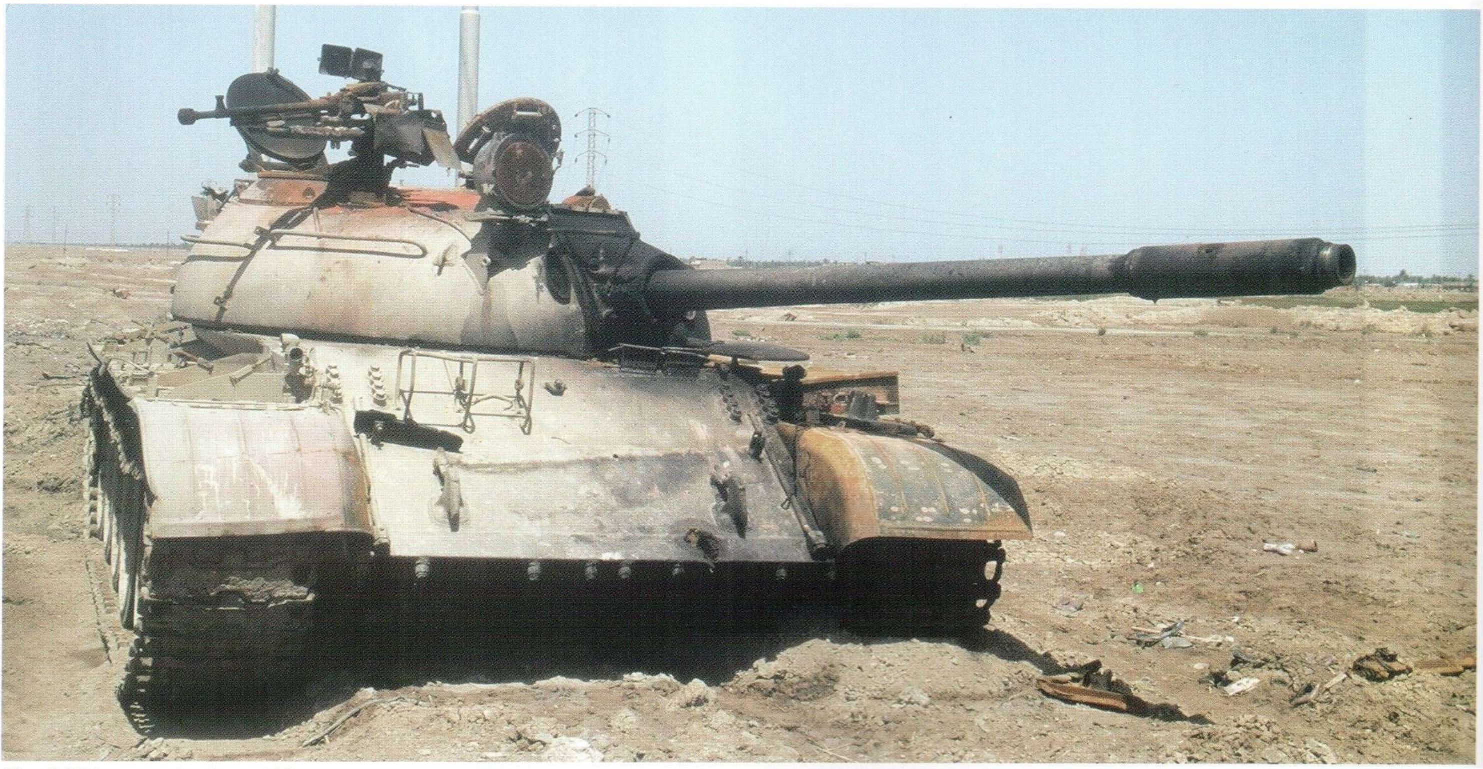
The risk paid off for the Scottish tanks, however. They were easily able to handle the T-55s with their TOGS thermal vision equipment.



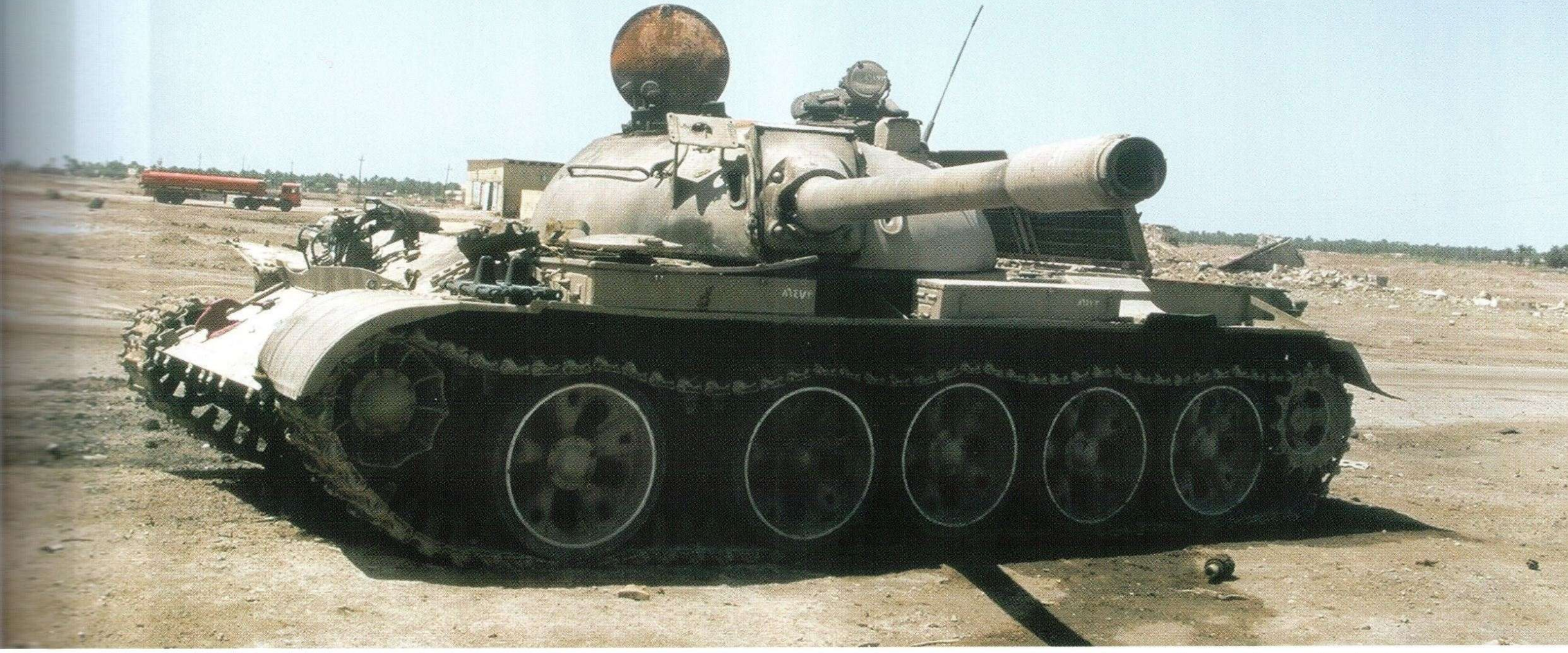
Smaller in size and weight than the Western tanks, the T-55 medium tank is used widely in Eastern Europe, Africa and the Middle East.



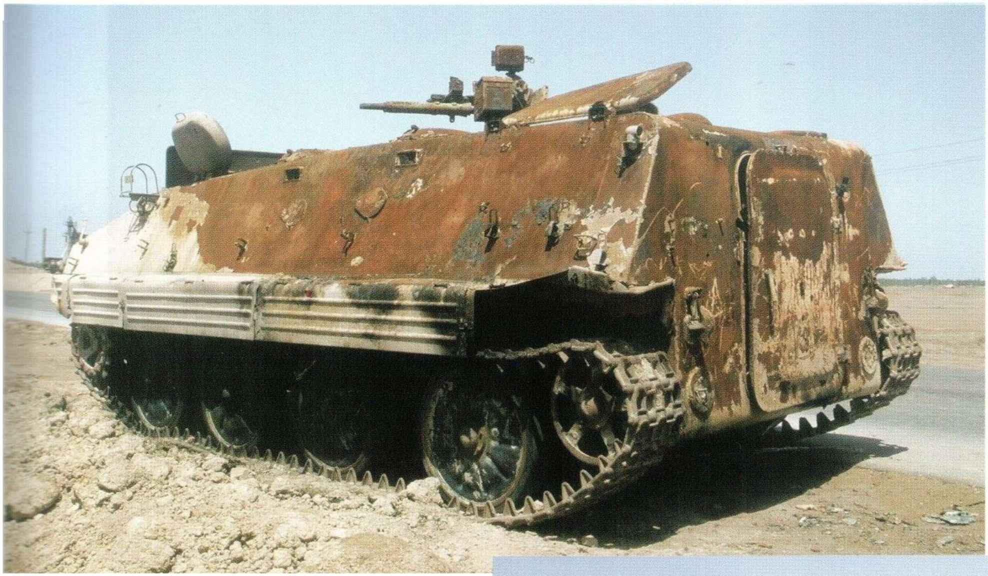
Drilled by Charm 3 depleted-uranium shells, the fourteen T-55s were destroyed within a minute.



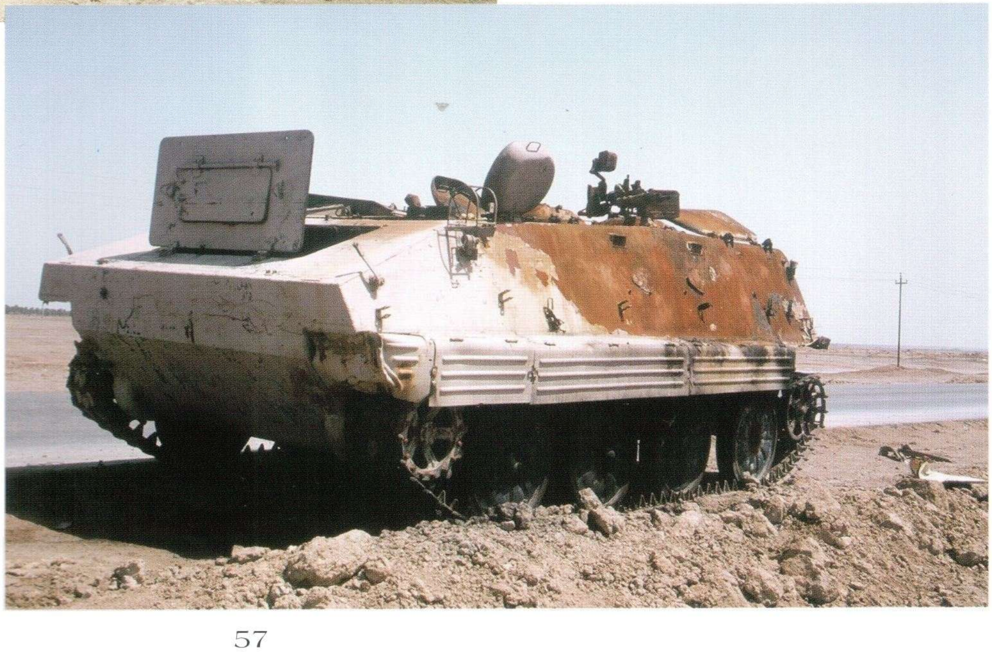
The T-55 is armed with a 100mm gun and is two feet shorter than the Challenger MBT. Note the fire damage on the armor of this tank.



The smaller size of the T-55 might be an advantage on other battlefields, enabling it to maneuver more easily than larger tanks. In this case, however, the T-55s were doomed from the start.

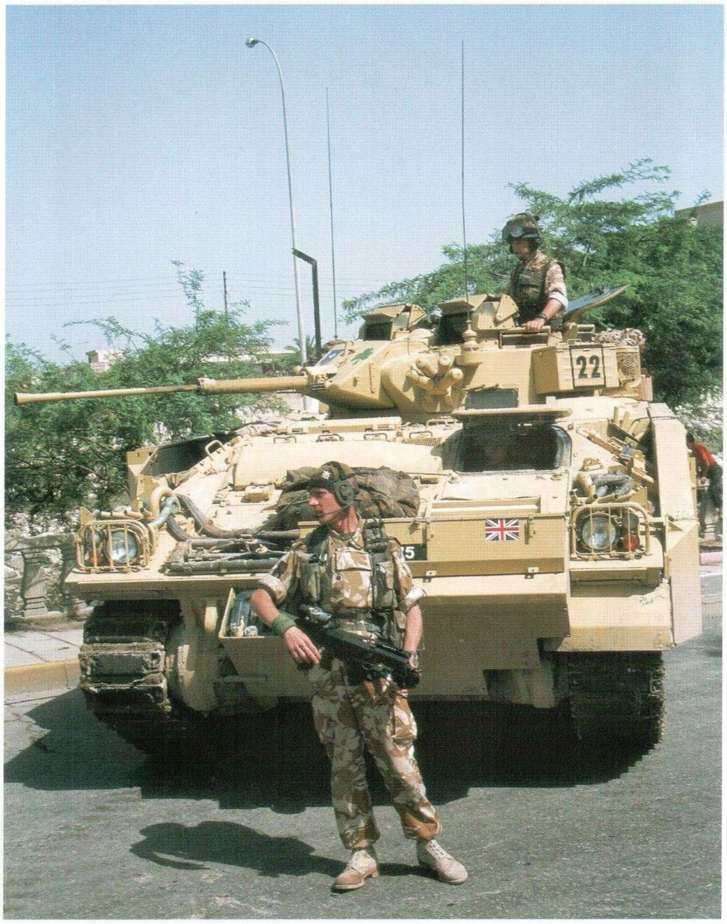


Two troop transports of Chinese origin, the Norinco YW 531C, were also destroyed during the fighting on 28 March.



Iraq acquired 150 of the Chinese troop transports. Each one carries 13 soldiers besides its crew of two.

Order Reigns in Basra

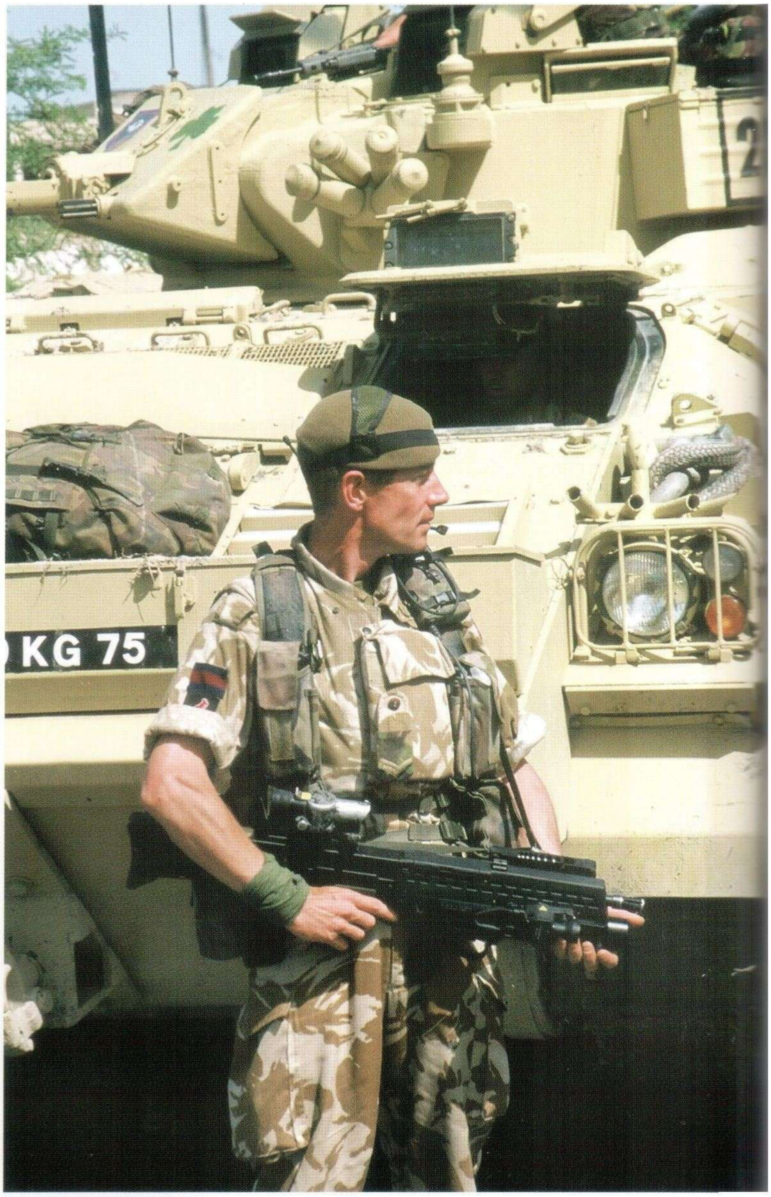


Elements of the Irish Guards regulated the disorganized traffic in Basra once it started up again.

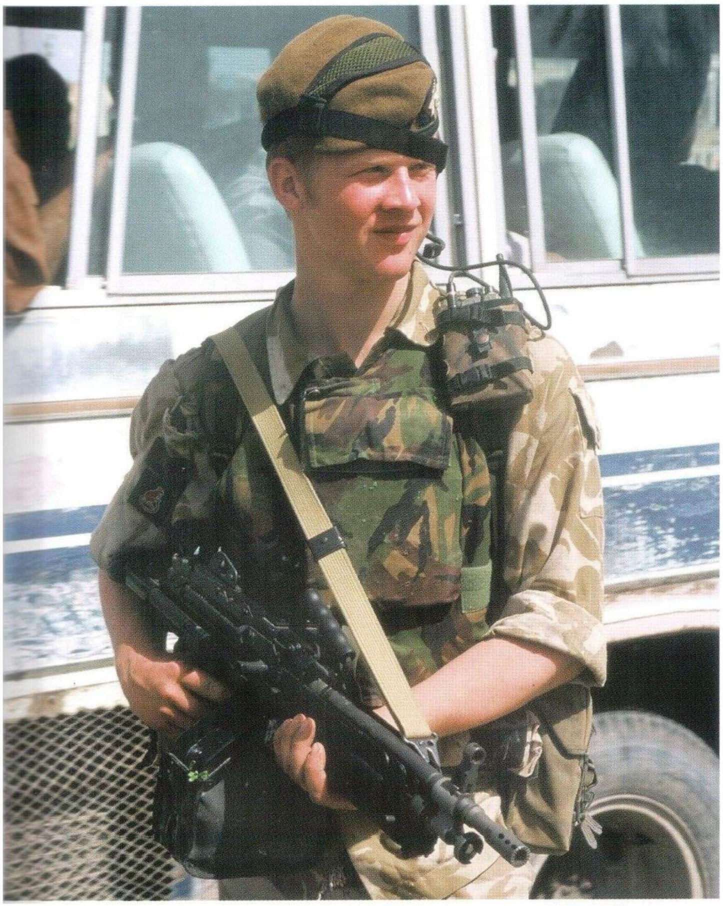
Basra. 14 April 2003. Her Majesty's Army was magnificent on that spring morning. Two days of pillaging end after a systematic coverage of the city by two prestigious British regiments that are proud of their sense of identity and are covered in glory. Abandoning helmets and flak jackets, the Irish Guards regulated traffic and the Black Watch patrolled discreetly. The "Ulster Drill", an effective tactic that is peculiar to the English soldiers, was the order of the day. Unlike the American troops, the British soldiers maintained a relaxed attitude so as not to frighten the Sh'iite population.

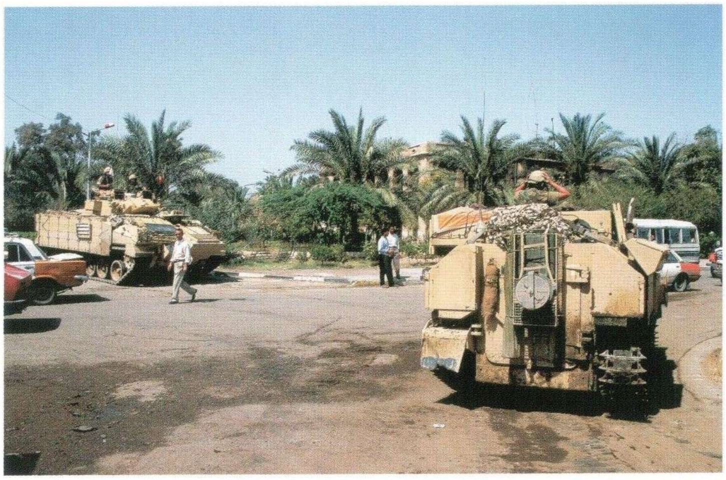
Royal Engineers erected a Bailey bridge over one of the branches of the Euphrates. The Warriors remained relatively discreet and the Challenger 2s stayed outside the gates of the city to avoid damaging the infrastructure of the city. The civilians and the soldiers knew that they would intervene at the least hint of a problem.

British soldiers like this one were instrumental in helping to restore normalcy in Basra.



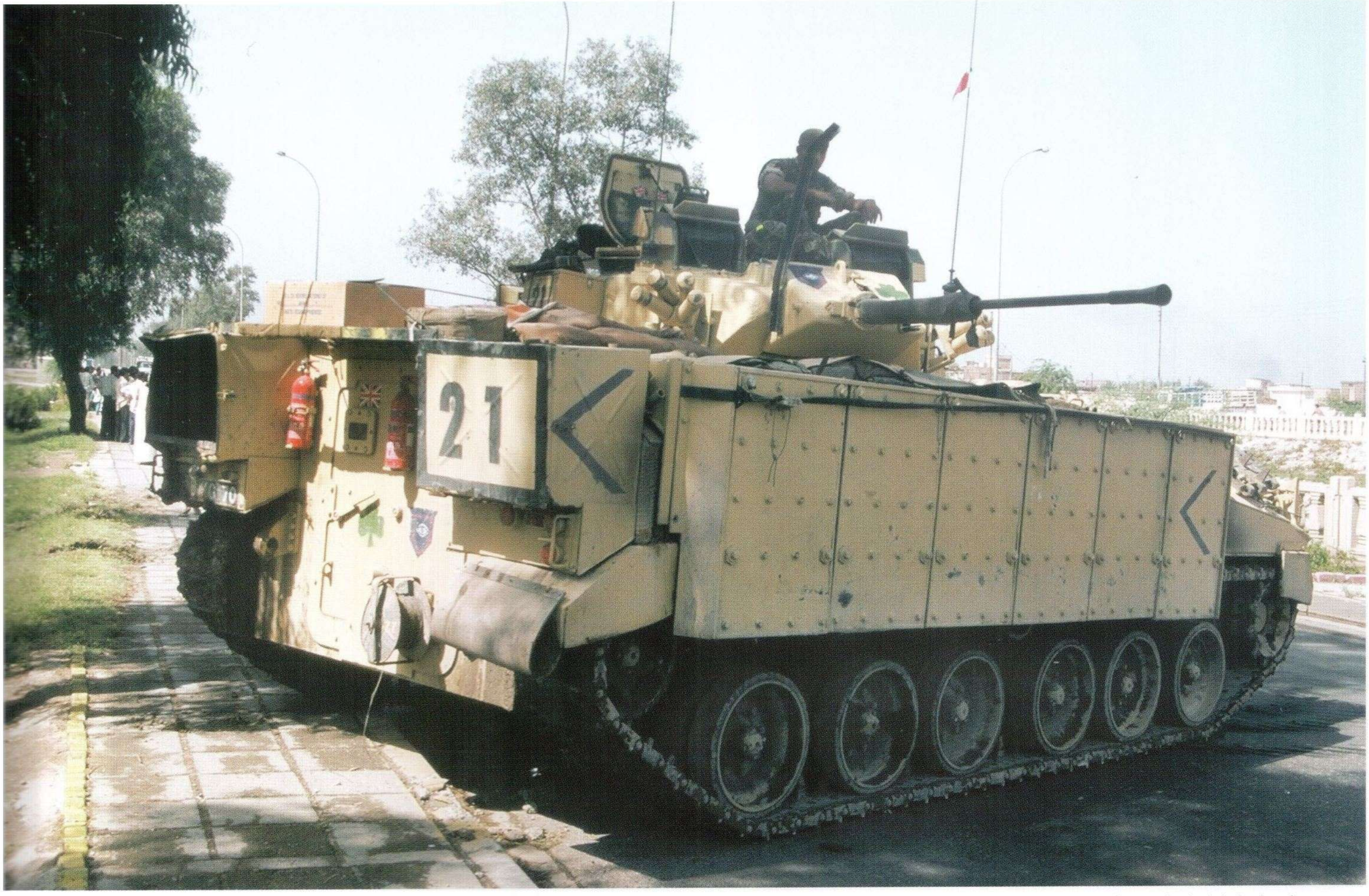
The British troops in Basra were armed with SA-80s with grenade launchers mounted on them and Minimi machine guns.



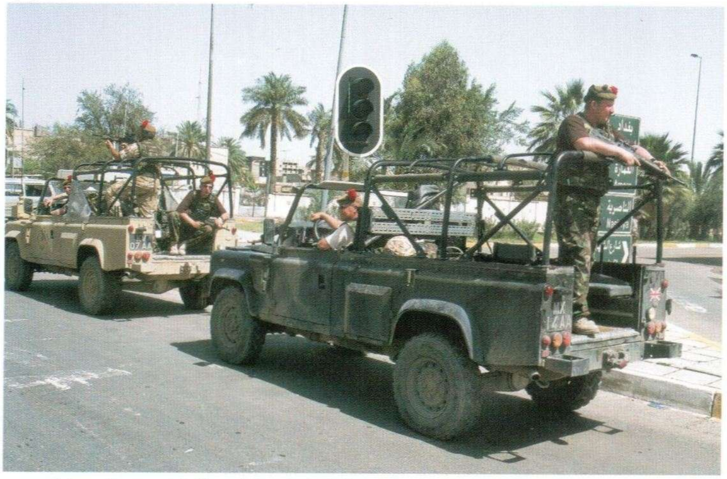


Warrior infantry fighting vehicles and Spartan armored personnel carriers patrol the streets of Basra.

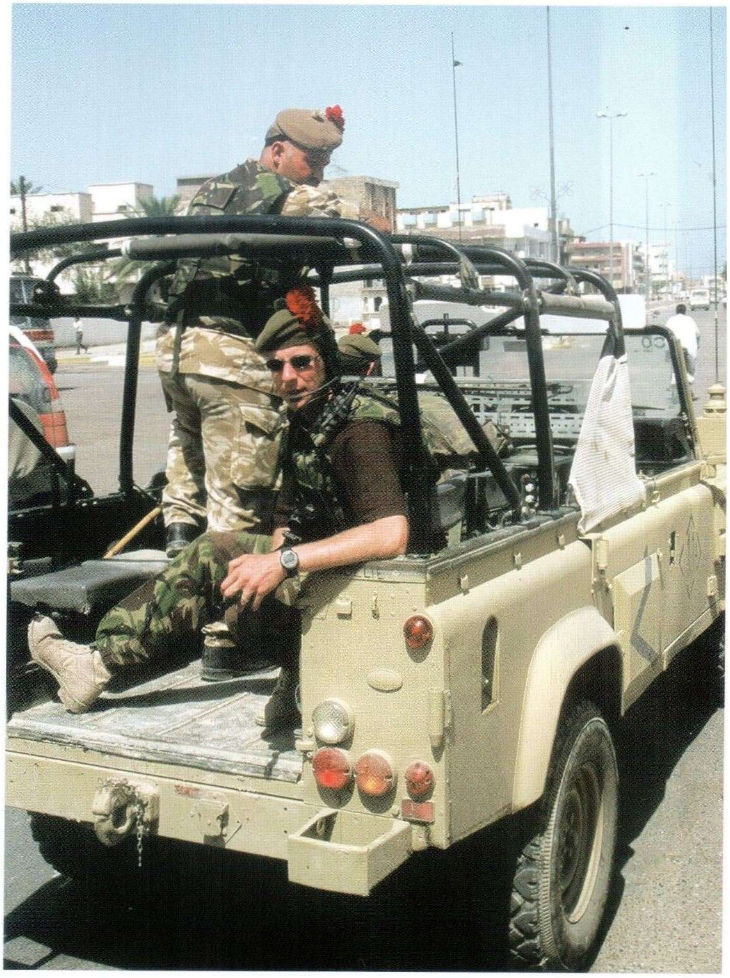
Like his American cousins across the Atlantic Ocean, this British soldier may seem a bit young to be entrusted with the difficult task of maintaining order in a war-torn region.



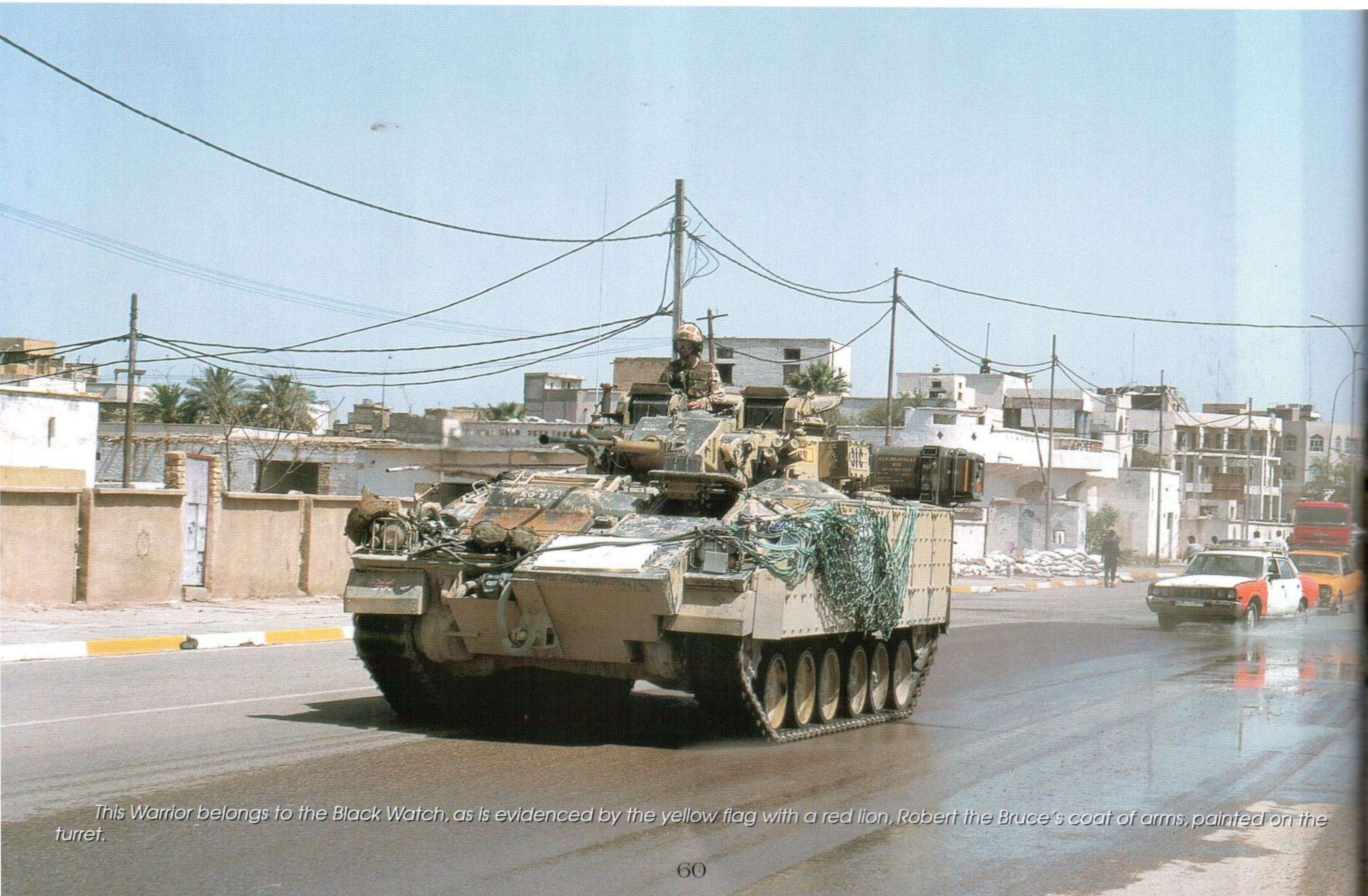
Painted on both the turret and the rear of this British Warrior infantry fighting vehicle is the blue insignia of the Guards (which features an eye) and the green Irish four-leaf clover. The insignia of the Irish Guards, which adorns the Warriors used by that unit, became quite familiar to the northern Europeans in 1944.



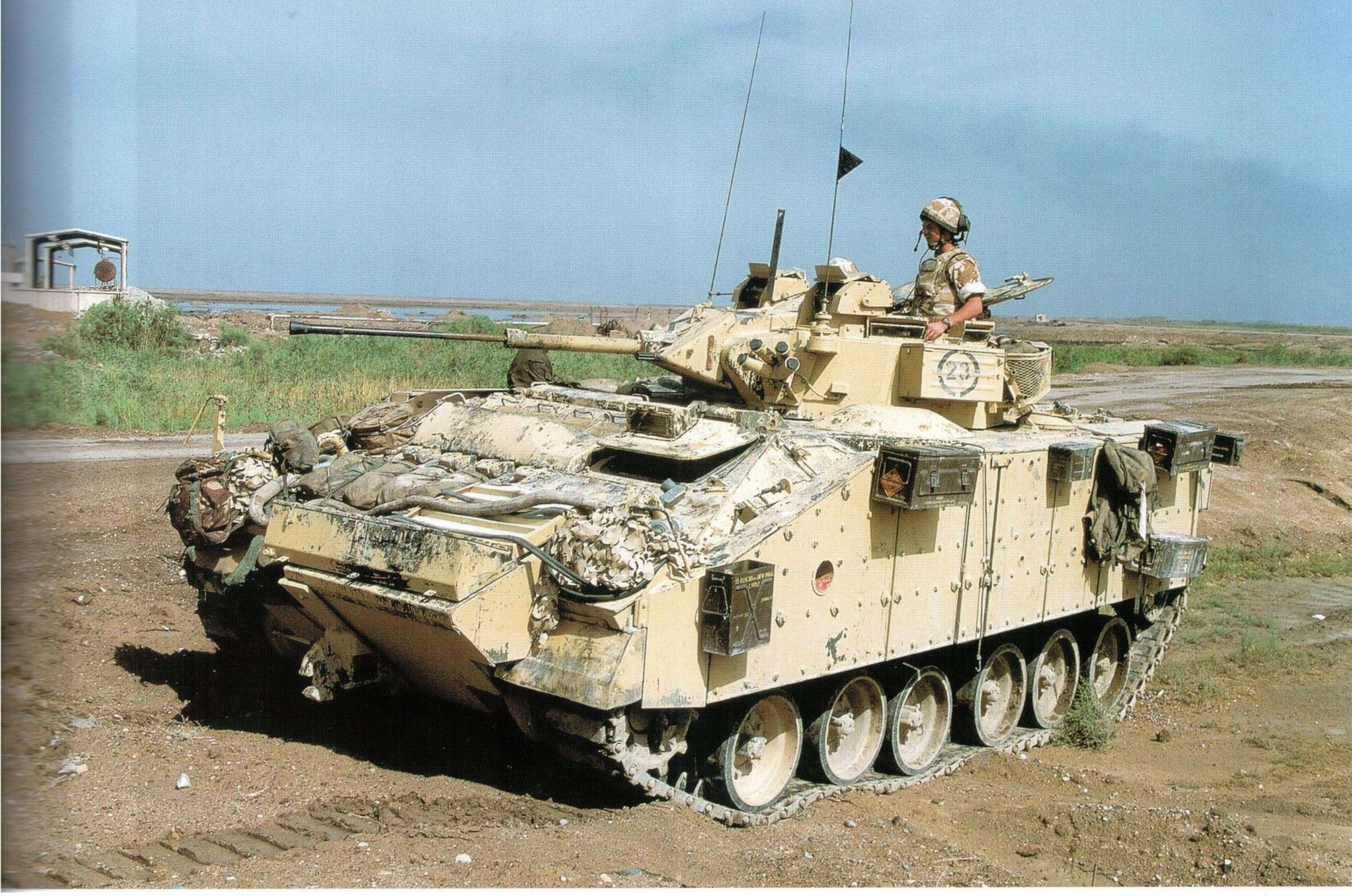
Members of the Black Watch patrol wearing their traditional headgear, a tam o'shanter adorned with a red hackle.



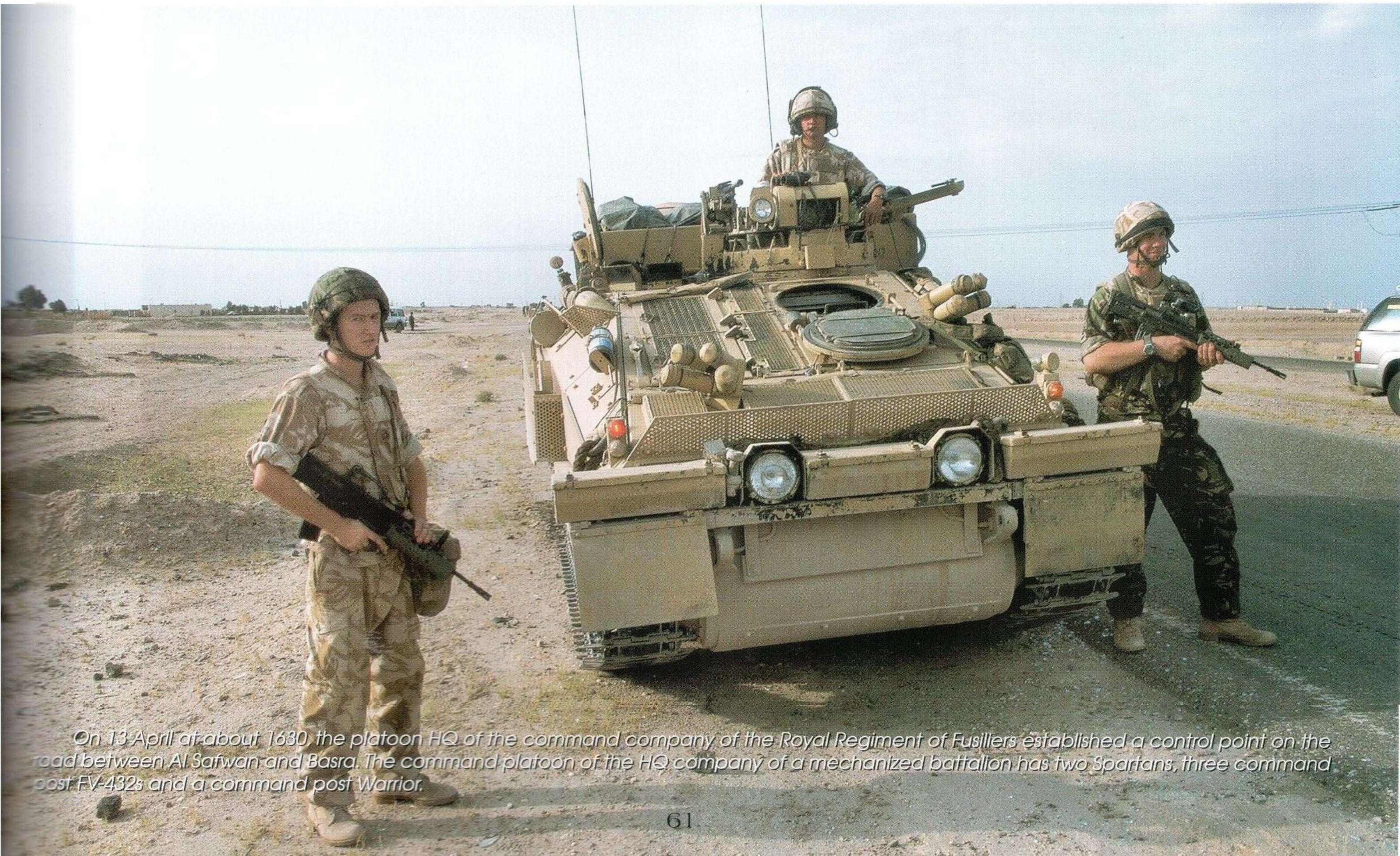
Soldiers of the Black Watch engage in some low-key patrolling of the city.



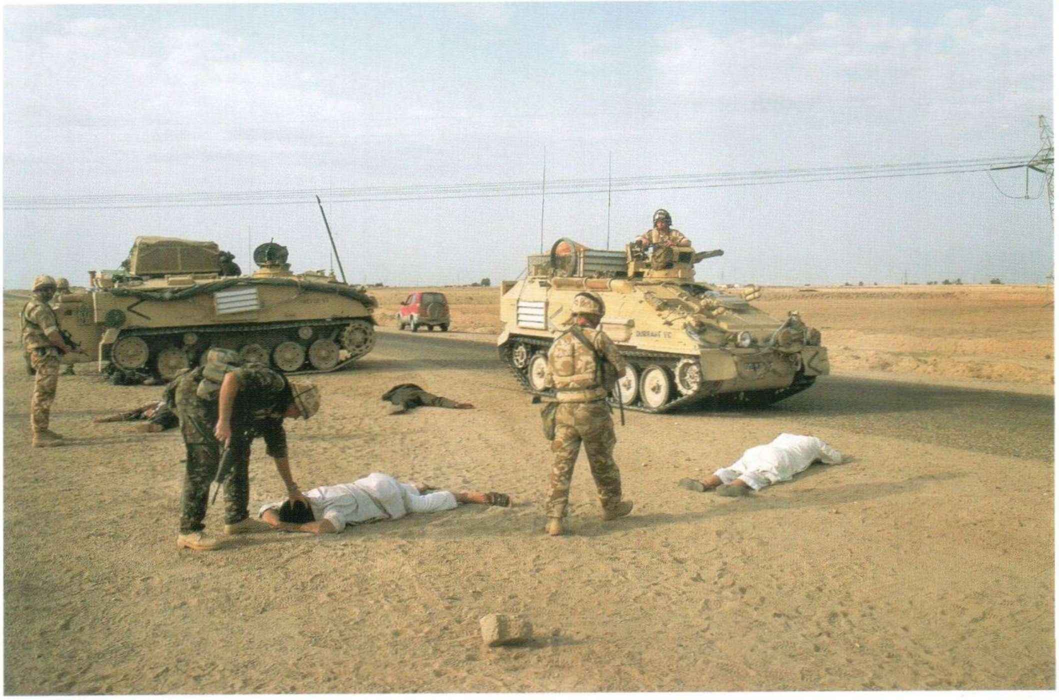
This Warrior belongs to the Black Watch, as is evidenced by the yellow flag with a red lion, Robert the Bruce's coat of arms, painted on the turret.



A Warrior of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers monitors traffic. Note how the small ammunition boxes attached to the side of the IFV are being used for storage. The Warrior is in position on one of the roads that serves as a southern approach to Basra.

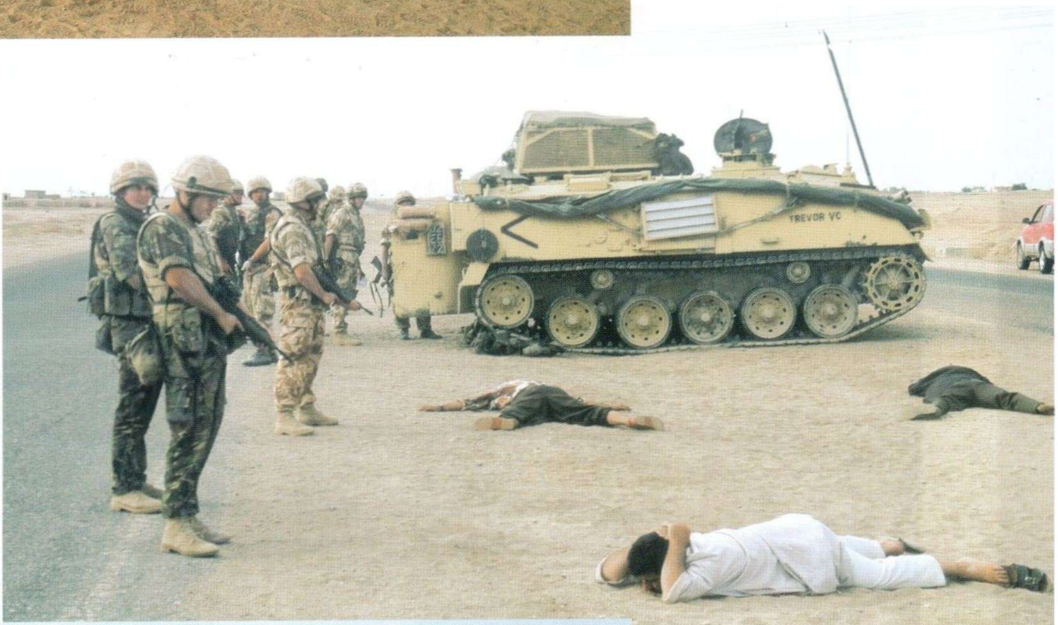


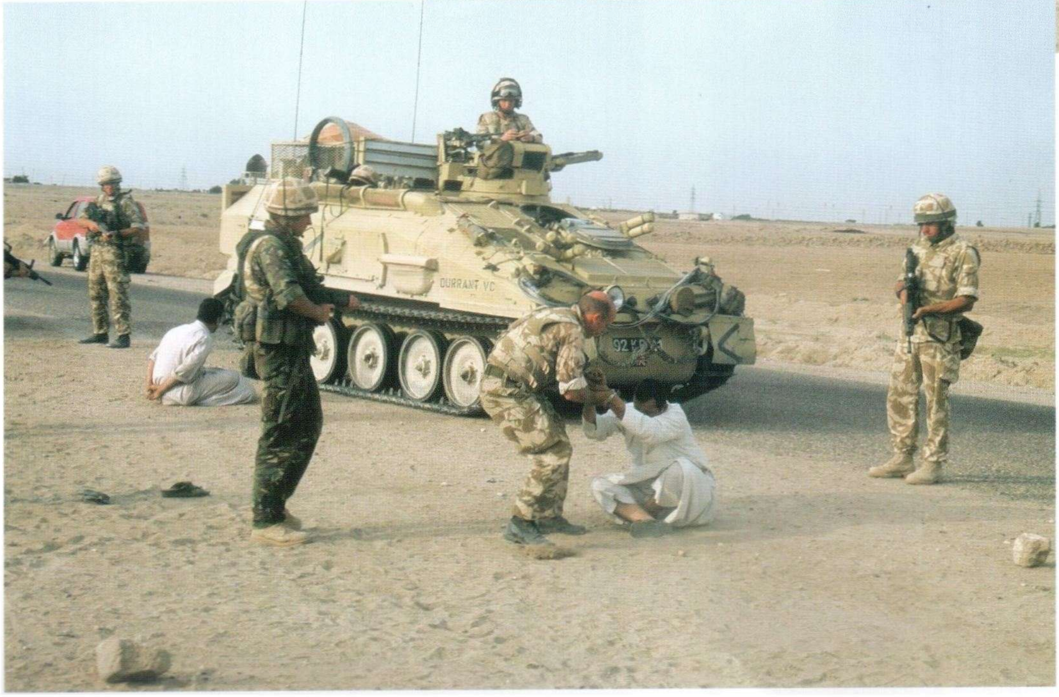
On 13 April at about 1630, the platoon HQ of the command company of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers established a control point on the road between Al Safwan and Basra. The command platoon of the HQ company of a mechanized battalion has two Spartans, three command post FV-432s and a command post Warrior.



The British established mobile checkpoints to protect themselves by reducing the transport of weapons and preventing the movement of undesirables. Often civilians were detained and searched unceremoniously.

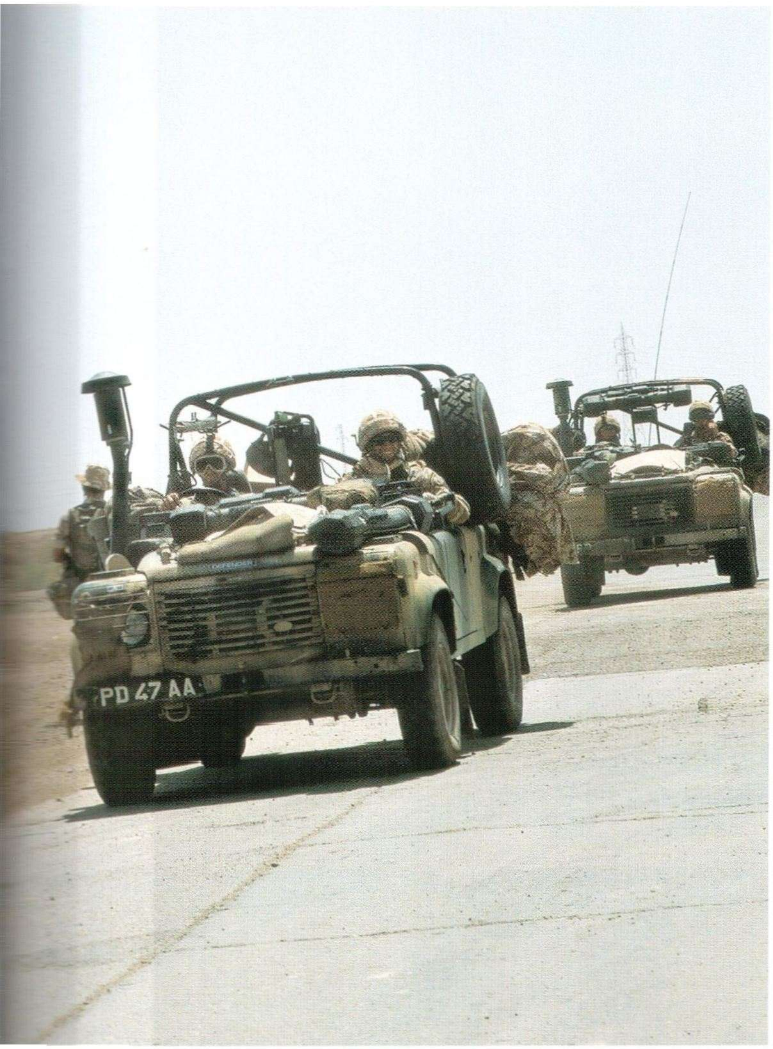
The treatment of civilians at checkpoints could seem harsh to some people, but hoped-for discoveries could result from detaining them. Two AK-47s were found in one civilian car ,that was stopped.



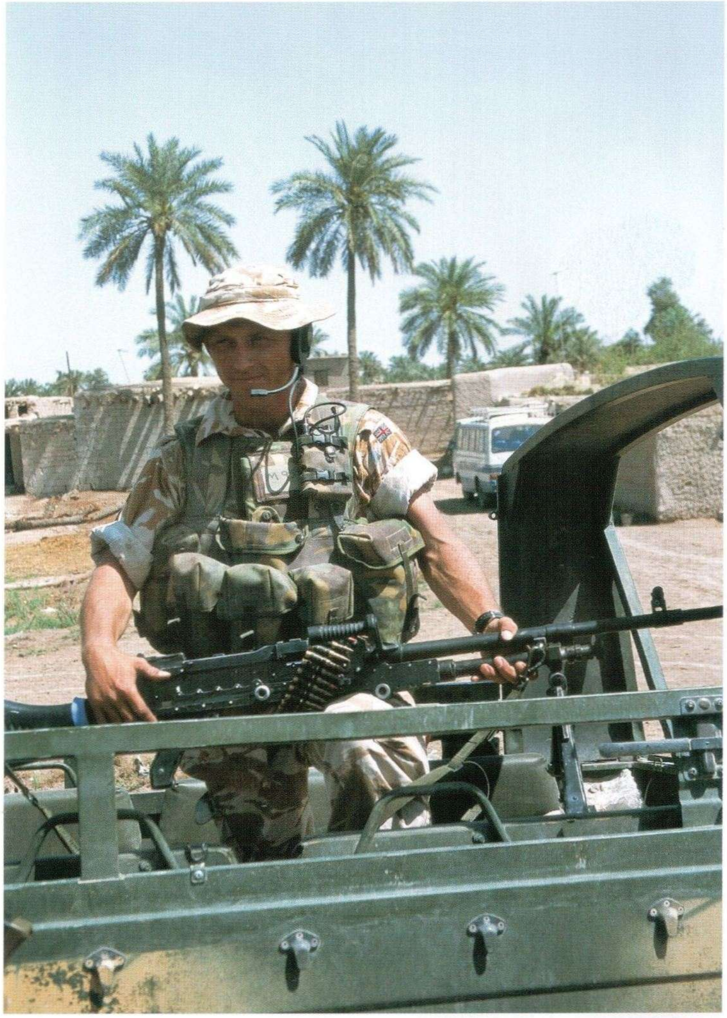


The interrogation of detainees at the battalion command post helped the British to discover if the arrested party was simply a looter or if he were a more dangerous militiaman.

Patrol in Al Faw



Royal Marines from 40 Commando patrol in the Al Faw peninsula.



Two bits of equipment seemed omnipresent during the patrol: the GPMG machine gun and Pinzgauer light trucks.

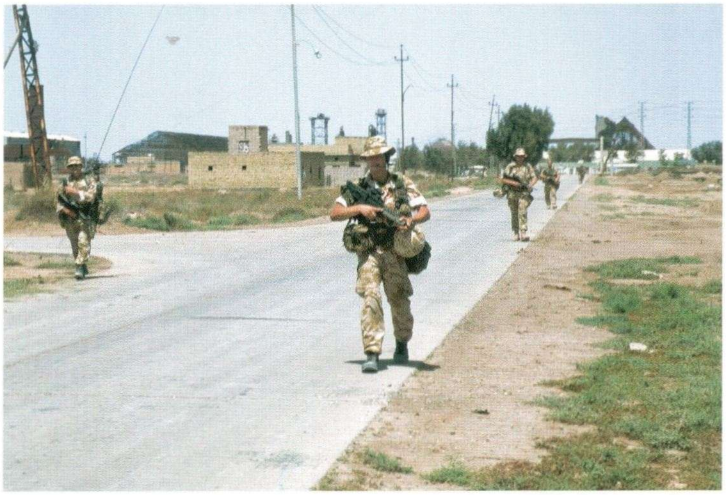
Our trip ends in the peninsula of Al Faw, which was the site of bitter fighting during the Iran-Iraq War. Here in this magnificent landscape of swamps and canals, the Royal Marines patrolled. The press officer of 40 Commando spent a few minutes summarizing the campaign of the green berets. He said that the initial assault was heliborne and not amphibian due to the threat posed by mines that the Iraqis had placed in the muddy waters of Shat-el-Arab. [Note: During the war in 1991, old Soviet-made mines seriously damaged a Tarawa-class amphibious transport and a US Navy cruiser.] "We had to attack coming from the sea," the officer related, "whereas 42 Commando was stuck in the peninsula."

The crash of a USMC CH-46 Sea Knight helicopter that was transporting a part of the British advanced unit caused the death of 12 people and completely upset the initial plan. The Iraqis took advantage of the situation, but their stiff resistance soon unraveled. The next day, the oil terminal, which was one of the main objectives of the campaign, was captured.

While 42 Commando took care of Umm Qasr, where they encountered many difficulties, particularly "friendly fire" from the Marines of the 15th MEU, the rest of the peninsula was cleaned up.

On 28 March, the Iraqis launched a counterattack. A torrent of shells fell, destroying three Pinzgauer wheeled vehicles. It was very impressive, but nobody was hurt. AS-90s of the 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery situated on the other side of Basra silenced the enemy artillery. At the same moment, the Challenger 2s of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards destroyed the T-55s that were counterattacking and, if properly led, probably would have retaken Al Faw since, with the exception of 40 Commando and some Scimitars, there was no one to hold the oil terminal. This war was conducted with a minimum of manpower.

Regarding the Iraqis that launched the counterattack, it seems to the author that they made one last-ditch effort to reassure "Chemical" Ali and his staff before deserting. "With just a little more 'punch'," the press officer added, "the attack could have caused us real problems."

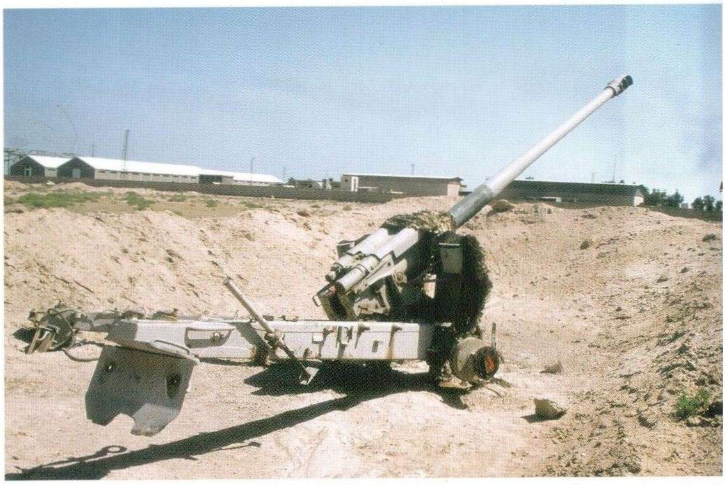


This particular patrol took place not far from the city of Abul Kashib.

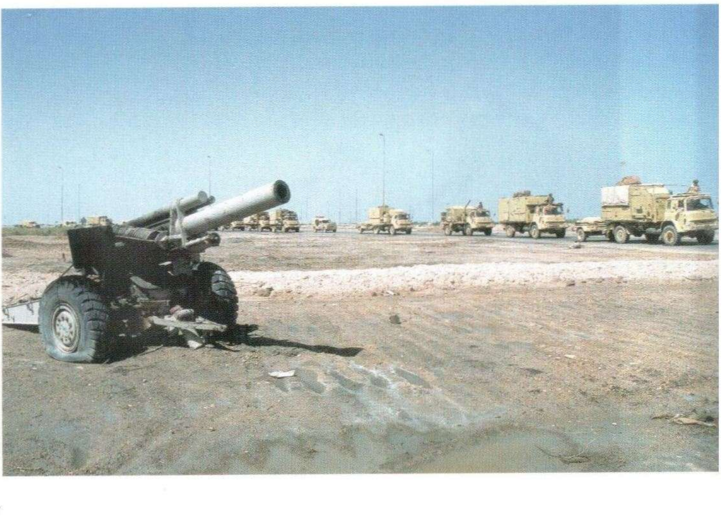
This photo gives a good idea of just how lightly equipped the British troops were during this patrol. Note that they wear "boonie" hats instead of helmets.

The lightness of the British equipment contrasts noticeably with the bulkiness of the gear that the American troops carried.

British Land Rover light vehicles were also used commonly on patrol.



The Iraqis left behind this 130mm M-56 gun when they retreated. This M-56 was found just south of Basra.



This last picture in our report is a symbolic image that shows an unstoppable British convoy passing by an M-114 155mm howitzer that once saw service in the army of Saddam Hussein.

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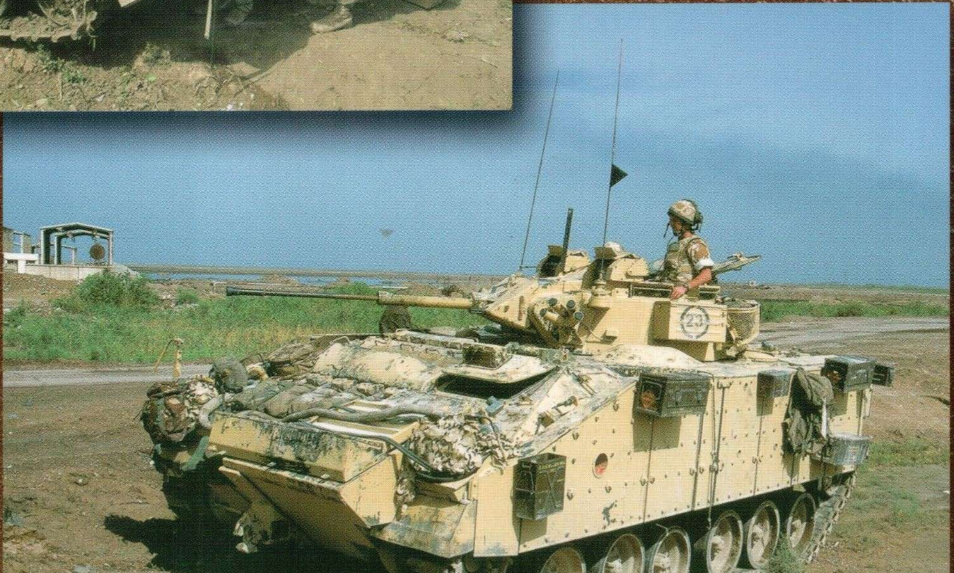

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